SNAGGED AND SUNK

BY HARRY CASTLEMON

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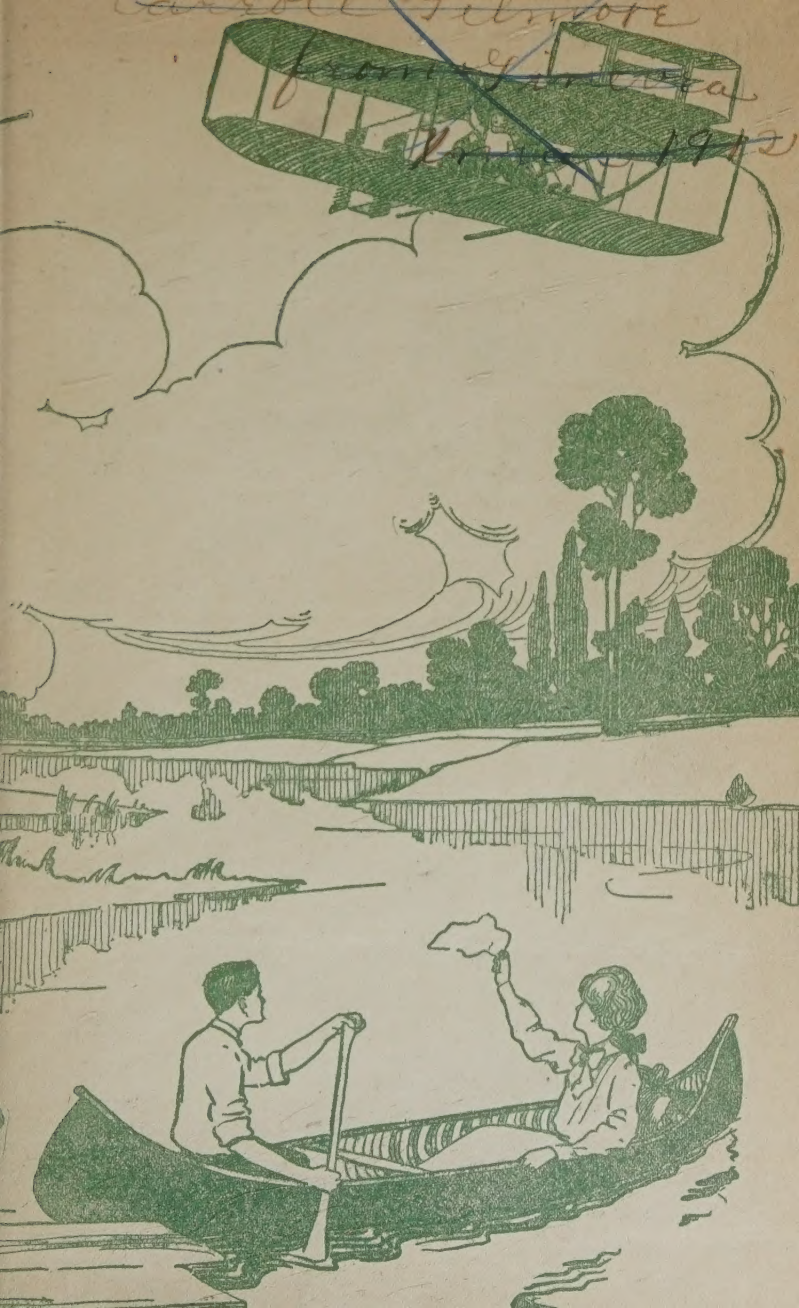

Arthur Hasting's Fortunate Arrival

FOREST AND STREAM SERIES.

SNAGGED AND SUNK;

OR, THE

ADVENTURES OF A CANVAS CANOE.

BY

HARRY CASTLEMON,

AUTHOR OF "GUNBOAT SERIES," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES," "SPORTSMAN CLUB SERIES," ETC.

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SNAGGED AND SUNK;

OR,

THE ADVENTURES OF A CANVAS CANOE.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I BEGIN MY STORY.

"Beneath a hemlock grim and dark,
Where shrub and vine are intertwining,
Our shanty stands, well roofed with bark,
On which the cheerful blaze is shining.
The smoke ascends in spiral wreath;
With upward curve the sparks are trending;
The coffee kettle sings beneath
Where sparks and smoke with leaves are blending."

JOE WAYRING'S voice rang out loud and clear, and the words of his song were repeated by the echoes from a dozen different points among the hills by which the camp was surrounded on every side. Joe was putting the finishing touches to the roof of a bark

shanty; Roy Sheldon, with the aid of a double-bladed camp ax, was cutting a supply of hard wood to cook the trout he had just cleaned; and Arthur Hastings was sitting close by picking browse for the beds. The scene of their camp was a spring-hole, located deep in the forest twelve miles from Indian Lake. Although it was a noted place for trout, it was seldom visited by the guests of the hotels for the simple reason that they did not know that there was such a spring-hole in existence, and the guides were much too sharp to tell them of it.

Hotel guides, as a class, are not fond of work, and neither will they take a guest very far beyond the sound of their employer's dinner horn. The landlords hire them by the month and the guides get just so much money, no matter whether their services are called into requisition or not. If business is dull and the guests few in number, the guides loaf around the hotel in idleness, and of course the less they do the less they are inclined to do. If they are sent out with a guest, they take him over grounds that have been hunted and

fished until there is neither fur, fin, nor feather left, cling closely to the water-ways, avoiding even the shortest "carries," their sole object being to earn their wages with the least possible exertion. They don't care whether the guest catches any fish or not. But our three friends, Joe Wayring, Roy Sheldon, and Arthur Hastings, were not dependent upon the hotel guides for sport during their summer outings. Being perfectly familiar with the country for miles around Indian Lake, they went wherever their fancy led them, and with no fear of getting lost.

"And on the stream a light canoe
Floats like a freshly fallen feather—
A fairy thing that will not do
For broader seas and stormy weather.
Her sides no thicker than the shell
Of Ole Bull's Cremona fiddle;
The man who rides her will do well
To part his scalp-lock in the middle,"

sang Joe, backing off and looking approvingly at his work. "There, fellows, that roof is tight, and now it can rain as soon as it pleases. With two acres of trout right in front of the

door, and a camp located so far from the lake that we are not likely to be disturbed by any interlopers—what more could three boys who want to be lazy ask for?"

"There's one thing I would like to ask for," replied Roy, "and that is the assurance that Tom Bigden and his cousins will go back to Mount Airy without trying to come any tricks on us. I wonder what brought them up here any way?"

"Why, they came after their rods, of course," answered Arthur. "You know I sent them a despatch stating that their rods were in Mr. Hanson's possession, and that they could get them by refunding the money that Hanson had paid Jake Coyle for them."

"But they have been loafing around the lake for a whole week, doing nothing but holding stolen interviews with Matt Coyle and his boys," said Roy. "I tell you I don't like the way those worthies put their heads together. I believe they are in ca-hoots. If they are not, how does it come that Tom and his cousins can see Matt as often as they want to, while the guides and landlords, who are so

very anxious to have him arrested, can not find him or obtain any satisfactory news of him?"

"That's the very reason they can't find him—because they want to have him arrested, and Matt knows it," observed Joe. "But why Tom doesn't reveal Matt's hiding-place to the constable is more than I can understand. Did it ever occur to you that perhaps Matt has some sort of a hold on those boys, and that they are afraid to go against him?"

"I have thought of it," replied Arthur. "I have never been able to get it out of my head that Tom acted suspiciously on the day your canvas canoe was stolen. He played his part pretty well, but I believed then, and I believe now, that he knew that canoe was gone before he came back to the beach."

"I know Tom didn't show much enthusiasm when we started after that bear, and that he did not go very far from the pond," assented Joe. "It is possible that he saw Matt steal my canoe, and that he made no effort to stop him; but I think you are mistaken when you say that they are in ca-hoots. I don't believe

they have any thing in common. Tom is much too high-toned for that. I know that he has been seen in Matt's company a time or two, but I am of the opinion that they met by accident and not by appointment."

"But Tom knew the officers were looking for Matt, and what was the reason he didn't tell them that he had seen him?" demanded Arthur.

"He probably would if he hadn't thought that we were the ones that wanted him arrested," replied Joe. "Tom and his cousins do not like us, and Matt Coyle might steal us poor, and they would never lift a hand or say a word to prevent it. But we are safe from them now. Even if they knew where to find us, Matt and his boys are much too lazy to walk twelve miles through the thick woods just to get into a fight with us."

Perhaps they were, and perhaps they were not. Time will show.

If you have read the first volume of the "Forest and Stream Series," you will recollect that the story it contained was told by "Old Durability," Joe Wayring's Fly-rod. In concluding

his interesting narrative, Fly-rod said that he would step aside and give place to his "accommodating friend," the Canvas Canoe, who, in the second volume of the series, would describe some of the incidents that came under his notice while he was a prisoner in the hands of the Indian Lake vagabonds, Matt Coyle and his two worthless boys, Jake and Sam. I am the Canvas Canoe, at your service, and I am now ready to redeem that promise.

You will remember that the last duty I performed for my master, Joe Wayring, was to take him and Fly-rod up to the "little perch hole," leaving Arthur Hastings and Roy Sheldon in the pond to angle for black bass. Joe preferred to fish for perch, because he was afraid to trust his light tackle in a struggle with so gamey a foe as a bass; but, as luck would have it, he struck one the very first cast he made, and got into a fight that was enough to make any angler's nerves thrill with excitement.

The battle lasted half an hour; and when it was over and the fish safely landed, Joe discovered that it was growing dark. While he

was putting Fly-rod away in his case I happened to look up the creek, and what should I see there but the most disreputable looking scow I ever laid my eyes on? I had never seen him before, but I knew the crew he carried, for I had had considerable experience with them. They were the squatter and his boys, who, as you know, had sworn vengeance against Joe Wayring and his friends, because Joe's father would not permit them to live on his land.

Matt and his young allies discovered Joe before the latter saw them, and made an effort to steal alongside and capture him before he knew that there was any danger near; but one of the impatient boys carelessly allowed his paddle to rub against the side of the scow, and the sound alarmed Joe, who at once took to the water and struck out for shore, leaving me to my fate. But I never blamed Joe for that, because I knew he could not have done any thing else. He had paid out a good deal of rope in order to place himself in the best position for casting, and he could not haul it in and raise the anchor before his enemies would be upon him.

"So that's your game, is it?" shouted the squatter, when he saw Joe pulling for the shore with long lusty strokes. "Wal, it suits us I reckon. Never mind the boat, Jakey. She's fast anchored and will stay there till we want her. Take after the 'ristocrat whose dad won't let honest folks live onto his land less'n they've got a pocketful of money to pay him for it. Jest let me get a good whack at him with my paddle, an' he'll stop, I bet you."

Now we know that Matt didn't tell the truth when he said that Joe Wayring's father would not let any one live on his land except those who had money to pay for the privilege. Mr. Wayring was one of the most liberal citizens in Mount Airy. Nearly all the men who were employed as guides and boatmen by the summer visitors lived in neat little cottages that he had built on purpose for them, and for which he never charged them a cent of rent; and when Matt Coyle and his family came into the lake with a punt load of goods, and took possession of one of his lots, and proceeded to erect a shanty upon it without asking his permission, Mr. Wayring did not utter one word of

protest. It is true that he was not very favorably impressed with the appearance of the new-comers, but he thought he would give them an opportunity to show what they were before he ordered them off his grounds. If they proved to be honest, hard-working people they might stay and welcome, and he would treat them as well as he treated the other inhabitants of "Stumptown."

But it turned out that Matt Coyle was neither honest nor hard-working. He had once been a hanger-on about the hotels at Indian Lake. He called himself an independent guide (neither of the hotels would have any thing to do with him), but, truth to tell, he did not do much guiding. He gained a precarious subsistence by hunting, trapping, fishing, and stealing. It was easier to steal a living than it was to earn it by hunting and trapping, and Matt's depredations finally became so numerous and daring that the guides hunted him down as they would a bear or a wolf that had preyed upon their sheep-folds, and when they caught him ordered him out of the country. To make sure of his going they destroyed

every article of his property that they could get their hands on, thus forcing him, as one of the guides remarked, to go off somewhere and steal a new outfit.

Where Matt and his enterprising family went after that no one knew. They disappeared, and for a few weeks were neither seen nor heard of; but in due time they rowed their punt into Mirror Lake, as I have recorded, and Matt and his boys at once sought employment as guides and boatmen. But here again they were doomed to disappointment. The managers of the different hotels saw at a glance that they were not proper persons to be trusted on the lake with a boatload of women and children, and told them very decidedly that their services were not needed. The truth was they drank more whisky than water, and guides of that sort were not wanted in Mount Airy.

Matt and his boys next tried fishing as a means of earning a livelihood; but no one could have made his salt at that, because the guests sojourning at the hotels and boarding houses, with the assistance of the regular guides, kept all the tables abundantly sup-

plied. This second failure made the squatters angry, and they concluded that affairs about Mount Airy were not properly managed, and they would "run the town" to suit themselves. But they could not do that either, for they were promptly arrested and thrust into the calaboose.

After they had been put in there twice, the trustees concluded that they were of no use in Mount Airy, and that they had better go somewhere else. Accordingly Matt received a notice to pull down his shanty and clear out. The officer who was intrusted with the writ had considerable trouble in serving it, but he had more in compelling the squatter to vacate the lot of which he had taken unauthorized possession. Matt and his boys showed fight, while the old woman, who, to quote from Frank Noble, "proved to be the best man in the party," threw hot water about in the most reckless fashion. After a spirited battle the representatives of law and order came off victoriously, and Matt and his belongings were tumbled unceremoniously into the punt and shoved out into the lake. This made them

almost frantic ; and before they pulled away they uttered the most direful threats against those who had been instrumental in driving them out of Mount Airy "because they were poor and didn't have no good clothes to wear," and they even went so far as to threaten to burn Mr. Wayring's house. But you will remember that it was Tom Bigden, a boy who hated Joe for just nothing at all, who put that idea into Matt's head.

Being once more adrift in the world, the squatter made the best of his way to Sherwin's pond to carry out certain other plans that had been suggested to him by that same Tom Bigden, who never could be easy unless he was getting himself or somebody else into trouble. Between the lake and the pond there were twelve miles of rapids. Having run them scores of times under the skillful guidance of my master, I may be supposed to be tolerably familiar with them, and to this day I can not understand how Matt ever succeeded in getting his clumsy old punt to the bottom of them in safety. He must have had a hard time of it, for the bow of his craft was so badly battered

by the rocks that it was a mystery how he ever took it across the pond and up the creek to the place where he made his temporary camp. With his usual caution he concealed his shanty in a grove of evergreens, and waited as patiently as he could for something to "turn up." Tom Bigden had assured him that he could make plenty of money by simply keeping his eyes open, but Matt did not find it so.

"I don't b'lieve that 'ristocrat knew what he was talkin' about when he said that some of them sailboats up there in the lake would be sure to break loose, an' that I could make money by ketchin' 'em as they come through the rapids, an' givin' 'em up to their owners," said the squatter one day, when his supply of corn meal and potatoes began to show signs of giving out. "There ain't nary one of 'em broke loose yet, an' if any one of them p'inters an' hound dogs that we've heared givin' tongue in the woods ever lost their bearin's I don' know it, fur they never come nigh me."

"He said that if the things he was talkin'

about didn't happen of theirselves, he'd make 'em happen," suggested Jake.

"What do you reckon he meant by that?"

"Why, it was a hint to you to go up to the lake some dark night, an' turn the boats loose," replied Jake. "Then they'd come down, an' we could ketch 'em an' hold fast to 'em till we was offered a reward fur givin' 'em up. But, pap, since I've seed them rapids, I don't b'lieve that no livin' boat could ever come through 'em without smashin' herself all to pieces, less'n there was somebody aboard of her to keep her off'n the rocks."

"No more do I," answered Matt, "an' I shan't bother with 'em, nuther. I ain't forgot that they've got a calaboose up there to Mount Airy, an' that they'd jest as soon shove a feller into it as not. But something has got to be done, or else we'll go hungry for want of grub to eat."

So saying, Matt shouldered his rifle, and set out to hunt up his dinner, and on the same day Joe Wayring and his two chums, accompanied by Tom Bigden, and his cousins, Ralph and Loren Farnsworth, ran the rapids into

Sherwin's Pond, to fish for bass. They caught a fine string, as every one did who went there, and were talking about going ashore to cook their breakfast, when they discovered a half-grown bear on the shore of the pond. Of course they made haste to start in pursuit of him—all except Tom Bigden. The latter told himself that the bear did not belong to him, that it was no concern of his whether he were killed or not, and sat down on a log and fought musquitoes while waiting for Joe and the rest to tire themselves out in the chase and come back.

Now Matt Coyle had his eye on that bear, and wanted to shoot him too, for, as I have said, his larder was nearly empty. He was ready to do something desperate when he saw Joe and his companions paddle ashore and frighten the game, but presently it occurred to him that he might profit by it. He knew that the boys would never have come so far from home without bringing a substantial lunch with them, and as they had left their canoes unguarded on the beach, what was there to hinder him from sneaking up through the bushes and

stealing that lunch? Turn about was fair play. And, while he was about it, what was there to prevent him from taking his pick of the canoes? Then he would have something to work with. He could go up to Indian Lake and make another effort to establish himself there as independent guide; and, if he failed to accomplish his object, he could paddle about in his canoe, rob every unguarded camp he could find, and make the sportsmen who came there for recreation so sick of those woods that they would never visit them again. In that way he could ruin the hotels as well as the guides who were so hostile to him. It was a glorious plan, Matt told himself, and while he was turning it over in his mind he suddenly found himself face to face with Tom Bigden.

You know the conversation that passed between these two worthies, and remember how artfully Tom went to work to increase the unreasonable enmity which Matt Coyle cherished against Joe Wayring. After taking leave of Tom, the squatter plundered all the canoes that were drawn up beside me on the

beach, first making sure of the baskets and bundles that contained the lunches, gave them all into my keeping, and shoved out into the pond with me. If I had possessed the power wouldn't I have turned him overboard in short order? Matt was so clumsy and awkward that I was in hopes he would capsize me and spill himself out; but, although he could not make me ride on an even keel, he managed to keep me right side up, and, much to my disgust, I carried him safely across the pond and up the creek to his shanty.

As the squatter was impatient to begin the business of guiding so that he could make some money before the season was over, and anxious to get beyond reach of the officers of the law who would soon be on his track, he lost no time in breaking camp and setting out for Indian Lake. Before he went he burned his shanty and punt, so that the Mount Airy sportsmen could not find shelter in the one or use the other in fishing in the pond. He spent half an hour in trying to take me to pieces, so that he could carry me in his hand as if I were a valise, and finally giving it up as a task be-

yond his powers, he raised me to his shoulder and fell in behind his wife and boys, who led the way toward Indian Lake.

During the short time I remained in Matt Coyle's possession I fared well enough, for I was too valuable an article to be maltreated ; but I despised the company I was obliged to keep and the work I was expected to do. Matt's first care was to lay in a supply of provisions for the use of his family ; and as he had no money at his command and no immediate prospect of earning any, of course he expected to steal every thing he wanted. This was not a difficult task, for long experience had made him and his boys expert in the line of foraging. Nearly all the guides cultivated little patches of ground and raised a few pigs and chickens, and when their duties called them away from home there was no one left to guard their property except their wives and children. The latter could not stand watch day and night, and consequently it was no trouble at all for Matt and his hopeful sons to rob a hen-roost or a smokehouse as often as they felt like it. But, as it happened, the very

first foraging expedition he sent out, after he made his new camp about two miles from Indian Lake, resulted most disastrously for Matt Coyle. He ordered Jake and me to forage on Mr. Swan, the genial, big-hearted guide of whom you may have heard something in "The Story of a Fly-rod;" or, rather, Jake was to do the stealing, and I was to bring back the plunder he secured.

The young scapegrace had no difficulty in getting hold of a side of bacon and filling a bag with potatoes, which he dug from the soil with his hands, but there his good fortune ended. While he was making his way up the creek toward home, he was discovered by Joe Wayring and his two friends, Roy and Arthur, who were going to Indian Lake for their usual summer's outing. Of course they at once made a determined effort to recapture me, and Jake in his mad struggle to escape ran me upon a snag and sunk me, thus putting it out of his father's power to go into the business of independent guiding. The fights that grew out of that night's work were numerous and desperate, and Matt declared that he would "even

up" with the boys if he had to wait ten years for a chance to do it.

It was the work of but a few moments for my master, with the aid of his friends, to bring me back to the surface of the water where I belonged. He took me home with him when his outing was over, and there I lived during the winter in comparative quiet, while Joe and his chums were made the victims of so many petty annoyances that it was a wonder to me how they kept their temper as well as they did. Matt Coyle and his boys could not do any thing to trouble them, because they were afraid to show themselves about the village; but Tom Bigden and his cousins were alert and active. They bothered Joe in every conceivable way. They made a lifelong enemy of Mars by sending him home through the streets with a tin can tied to his tail; they shot at Roy Sheldon's tame pigeons as often as the birds ventured within range of their long bows; they overturned Joe's sailboat after he had hauled it out on the beach and housed it for the winter; and one night I heard them talk seriously of setting fire to the boathouse.

Loren and Ralph Farnsworth, however, were not willing to go as far as that, knowing, as they did, that arson was a State's prison offense, but they agreed to Tom's proposition to break into the boathouse and carry off "that old canvas canoe that Joe seemed to think so much of," because they could do as much mischief of that sort as they pleased, and no blame would be attached to them. It would all be laid at Matt Coyle's door.

If I had been able to speak to him I would have told Tom that he was mistaken when he said this, for Joe Wayring knew well enough whom he had to thank for every thing that happened to him that winter. Tom and his allies forgot that their foot-prints in the snow and the marks of their skates on the ice were, as Roy expressed it, "a dead give away."

Joe, however, did not say or do any thing to show that he suspected Tom, for he was a boy who liked to live in peace with every body; but when he came down to the boathouse the next morning and found that some one had been tampering with the fastenings of the door, he took me on his shoulder and carried

me to his room, where I remained until the winter was passed and the boating season opened.

In the meantime I made the acquaintance of Fly-rod, who has told you a portion of my history, and who was as green a specimen as I ever met; but what else could you expect of a fellow who had never seen any thing of the world or caught a fish! A few Saturdays spent at the spring-holes and along the banks of the trout streams proved him to be a strong, reliable rod, and by the time the summer vacation came Joe had learned to put a good deal of confidence in him. One of the most noteworthy exploits Fly-rod ever performed was capturing that big bass at the perch-hole. That was on the day that Matt Coyle and his boys came down the creek in their scow and made a captive of me and chased my master through the woods; and this brings me back to my story.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTURED AGAIN.

I NEED not assure you that I was deeply interested in the exciting scene that was enacted before me. I rode helplessly at my moorings and watched Joe Wayring as he swam down the stream with his sturdiest strokes to get clear of the lily-pads before attempting a landing, and then I turned my attention to Matt Coyle and his boys, who had come to grief in their efforts to force their way to the shore.

"Back out!" shouted Matt, when he found that his scow could neither ride over or break through the strong, tangled stems of the lily-pads. "Be in a hurry, or he'll get sich a start on us that we can't never ketch him." And then he swung his heavy paddle around his head and threw it at Joe, just as the latter crawled out upon the bank.

Joe saw the missile coming toward him, and when it struck the ground he caught it up and threw it back. He didn't hit Matt, as he meant to do, but he struck Jake such a stunning blow in the face that the boy could take no part in the pursuit that followed. It came pretty near knocking him overboard. I would have laughed if I could, but I did not feel so jubilant when I heard Matt say :

"Sam, you an' Jakey get into the canoe an' paddle down the pond so's to cut him off when he tries to swim off to the skiff."

In obedience to these instructions the two boys took possession of me, hauled up the anchor, and paddled swiftly down the creek, while Matt kept on after Joe, who was running through the woods like a frightened deer. When we came out into the pond I saw him standing on the bank beckoning to Arthur and Roy, who lost no time in bringing the skiff to his relief. I saw Joe run into the water and strike out to meet them, and I also heard him say :

"Boys, never mind me. I've got my second wind now and can swim for an hour. Go up

there and capture my canoe, or else run over him and send him to the bottom. Don't let those villains take him away from me again."

But Arthur and Roy did not think it best to act upon this suggestion until they had taken care of Joe; and by the time they had got him into the skiff it was too late for them to do any thing for me; for Jake and his brother had put themselves out of harm's way by pulling for the shore, where Matt was waiting for them. When they reached it they lifted me from the water and carried me so far into the bushes that they knew Joe and his friends would not dare follow them, and then each of them sheltered himself behind a tree. Matt and his boys were afraid of Roy Sheldon, who was a swift and accurate thrower, and when the latter rose to his feet to see what they had done with me they thought he was about to open fire on them with potatoes, as he had done once or twice before.

"I'm onto your little game," shouted the squatter, peeping out from behind his tree and shaking his fist at the boys in the skiff. "You don't fire no more taters at me if I

know it. Your boat is here, an' if you want it wusser'n we do, come an' get it. 'Tain't much account nohow. Now then," added Matt, as he saw the boys turn their skiff about and pull back toward the other side of the pond, "ketch hold of this canoe, all of us, an' we'll tote him up to the creek."

"Say, pap," Sam interposed, "why don't we foller 'em over there an' gobble up their other boat an' bust up their things?"

"That's what I say," groaned Jake, who wanted revenge for the stinging blow that Joe had given him with Matt's paddle. "We're better men than they ever dare be. I shan't rest easy till I larrup that Joe Wayring."

"Now jest listen at the two fules!" exclaimed the squatter, in a tone of disgust. "Have you forgot the peltin' they give us with our own taters last summer? 'Pears to me that you hadn't oughter forget it, Jakey, 'cause when you got that whack in the stummik you raised sich a hollerin' that you could have been heared clear up to Injun Lake. Seems as though I could feel that bump yet," added Matt, passing a brawny fist over his

cheek where a potato, thrown by Arthur Hastings' hand, had left a black and blue spot as large as a hen's egg. "We'll wait till they get camped for the night, an' then we'll go over there an' steal ourselves rich."

If Matt had taken another look at the boys instead of being in such haste to carry me up to the creek, he never would have thought seriously of making a night attack upon their camp. Joe and his friends had received a reinforcement in the person of Mr. Swan, a hotel guide whom Matt Coyle had good reason to remember. The guide had taken an active part in driving him and his vagabond crew out of the Indian Lake country, and he was looking for him when he met Joe and his chums. But Matt, believing that the boys had no one to depend on but themselves, was sure that by a stealthy approach and quick assault he could wipe out all old scores and enrich himself without incurring the smallest risk, and he and his allies grew enthusiastic while they talked about the great things they meant to do that night.

During the progress of their conversation I

learned, for the first time, what had become of the rods and reels that Matt stole from Joe and his party in Sherwin's pond. Jake, who acted as his father's agent, had sold them to Mr. Hanson, the landlord of the Sportsman's Home, for four dollars apiece—all except the one belonging to Arthur Hastings, which Jake affirmed had been broken by a black bass. For that he received two dollars. I learned, further, that Matt had failed again in his efforts to find employment as guide for the Indian Lake country. The hotels would not hire him, and neither would the guests to whom he offered his services. This left Matt but one resource, and that was to carry out his oft-repeated threat that if he couldn't act as guide about that lake nobody should. He had already robbed three camps, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that by doing it he had created great consternation among the summer visitors. The ladies protested that they could never think of going into the woods again as long as that horrid man was about, and the sportsmen who had suffered at his hands told their landlords very plainly

that they would not come near Indian Lake again until they were assured that Matt Coyle had been arrested and lodged in jail.

"They're afeared of me, them folks up there to the lake be," chuckled the squatter, who was highly elated over the success of the plan he had adopted for ruining the hotels and breaking up the business of guiding. "I would have worked hard an' faithful for 'em if they had give me a chance to make an honest livin'; but they wouldn't do it, 'cause I didn't have no good clothes to wear, an' now they see what they have gained by their meanness. I won't be starved to death, an' that's jest all there is about it."

"Say, pap, what be you goin' to do with them two fine guns that's hid up there in the bresh?" inquired Sam.

"I ain't a-goin' to do nothin' with 'em," was the reply.

"Then why can't me an' Jake have 'em?"

"Now jest listen at the blockhead!" Matt almost shouted. "Ain't you got sense enough to know that if a guide should happen to ketch you runnin' about the woods with one of them

guns in your hands you would be 'rested an' locked up for a thief? I didn't take them guns 'cause I wanted 'em, but jest to drive them city sportsmen away from here. They ain't goin' to bring fine things into these woods when they know that they stand a chance of losin' 'em. An' if there ain't no guests to come here, what's the guides an' landlords goin' to do to make a livin'?"

"I've made a heap of money for you, pap, by sellin' them fish-poles an' takin' back the scatter-gun you hooked outen one of them camps, an' you ain't never give me nothin' for it," said Jake. "I reckon it's about time you was settlin' up."

"All right, I'll settle up with you this very minute," answered his father, cheerfully. "You can have this here canvas canoe for your own. Does that squar' accounts betwixt us?"

It wouldn't if I had had a voice in the matter, or possessed the power to protect myself; but I was helpless, and from that moment Jake claimed me as his property. He agreed, however, to lend me to his father as often as the latter thought it safe to go prospecting for un-

guarded camps. Half an hour later I was floating in the creek alongside the scow, and Matt and his boys were building a fire and preparing to regale themselves upon the big bass which Fly-rod had unwittingly caught for their supper. While they were thus engaged they talked over their plans for the night, and decided what they would do with the valuable things they expected to capture in Joe Wayring's camp.

"This here is the great p'int, an' it bothers me a heap, I tell you," said Matt, flourishing the sharpened stick that he was using as a fork. "Joe an' his friends are purty well known in this part of the country, an' so's their outfit; an' if we steal all they've got, as I mean to do afore I am many hours older, about the only things we can use will be the grub."

"Don't you reckon they've got new fish-poles to take the place of them you hooked from 'em up in Sherwin's pond?" inquired Sam.

"I know they have, 'cause they wouldn't come here without nothing to fish with, would

they? But 'twon't be safe to try to sell 'em right away, 'cause if we do folks will suspicion something."

"I'll bet you I won't take 'em up to the lake to sell 'em," said Jake very decidedly. "The folks up there know that you stole them fine guns we've got hid in the bresh, an' they'd 'rest me for helpin' of you. But there's one thing I want, an' I'm goin' to have it too, when we get Joe's property into our hands, an' that's some new clothes," added Jake, pulling his coat-sleeve around so that he could have a fair view of the gaping rent in the elbow. "These duds I've got on ain't fitten to go among white folks with."

"I don't see what's to hender you gettin 'em, Jakey," said his father, encouragingly. "If we get the skiff an' everything what's into it, in course we shall get the extry clothes they brung with 'em, an' you an' Sam can take your pick."

"An' I'm goin' to give that Joe Wayring the best kind of a poundin' to pay him for hittin' me in the face with your paddle," continued Jake.

"You can do that, too, an' I won't never say

a word agin it. All them fellers need bringin' down, an' I'd like the best way to see you boys do it. Now there's that skiff of their'n," added Matt, reflectively. "She's better'n the scow, 'cause she's got oars instead of paddles, an' can get around faster."

"An' she's big enough to carry us an' our plunder, an' she's got a tent, so't we wouldn't have to go ashore to camp when we wanted to stop for the night," said Sam. "But we'd have to steer clear of the guides, 'cause they all know her."

"We've got to steer clear of them anyhow, ain't we?" demanded Matt. "I reckon we'd best take her for a house-boat, an' use the canvas canoe to go a prospectin' for camps."

Matt and his boys continued to talk in this way until darkness came to conceal their movements, and then they stepped into the scow and paddled toward the pond, leaving me tied fast to a tree on the bank. I knew they were going on a fool's errand. They seemed to forget that Joe and his friends never went into the woods without taking a body-guard and sentinel with them; and, knowing how vigilant

Arthur Hastings' little spaniel was in looking out for the safety of the camp, I did not think it would be possible for the squatter, cunning as he was, to steal a march upon the boys he intended to rob. If Jim aroused the camp there would be the liveliest kind of a fight, and I was as certain as I wanted to be that the attacking party would come off second best.

The squatter was gone so long that I began to grow impatient ; but presently I heard loud and excited voices coming from the direction of the pond, mingled with cries of distress, the clashing of sticks, and other sounds to indicate that there was a battle going on out there. Although it seemed to be desperately contested, it did not last long, for in less than ten minutes afterwards I saw the scow coming into the creek. The very first words I heard convinced me that, although Matt and his boys had failed to surprise and rob Joe's camp, they had inflicted considerable damage upon him and his companions. To my great satisfaction I also learned that my confidence in Jim, the spaniel, had not been misplaced.

"If I ever get the chance I'll fill that little

black fice of their'n so full of bullet holes that he won't never be of no more use as a watch-dog, I bet you," said Sam, in savage tones. "We could have done jest what we liked with that there camp, an' every thing an' every body what's into it, if it hadn't been for his yelpin' an' goin' on."

"Now, listen at you!" exclaimed his father, impatiently. "I'm right glad the dog was there an' set up that yelpin', 'cause if we'd went ashore, like we meant to do, we'd a had that man Swan onto us."

"Well, what of it?" retorted Sam. "Ain't you a bigger man than he is?"

"That ain't nuther here nor there," answered Matt, who knew that he could not have held his own in an encounter with the stalwart guide. "Fightin' ain't what we're after. We want to do all the damage we can without bein' ketched at it."

"All I've made by this night's work is a prod in the ribs that will stay with me for a month," groaned Jake, who, as I afterwards learned, had received several sharp thrusts from the blade of Roy Sheldon's oar. "Pap,

you spiled our chances of gettin' that skiff for a house-boat when you told us to run into her. She's at the bottom of the pond by this time. Didn't you hear the planks rippin' and crackin' when we struck her?"

"Wal, then, what did they put theirselves in our way for!" demanded Matt, angrily. "Didn't you hear me tell 'em not to come nigh us, 'cause it would be wuss for 'em if they did? I seen through their little game in a minute. They wanted to keep us there till Swan could come up an' help 'em. What else could we do but run into 'em?"

This made it plain to me that the squatter had not acted entirely on the defensive—that he had made a desperate effort to send the skiff and her crew to the bottom of the pond; but, being better posted in natural philosophy than he was, I did not believe that he had succeeded in doing it. An unloaded skiff will not sink, even if her whole side is stove in, and I was positive that Matt Coyle would see more of that boat and of the boys who owned it before the doors of the penitentiary closed upon him.

In spite of Jake's protest and Sam's, Matt

decided to camp on the bank of the creek that night, and go home in the morning. The boys were afraid that the guide might assume the offensive and attack them while they were asleep; but their father quieted their fears by assuring them that he would not attempt any thing of the sort, 'cause why, he couldn't. The skiff was sunk, Swan's canoe wasn't large enough to carry more than one man at a load, and the guide, brave as he was supposed to be, would not think of coming up there alone. More than that, he did not know where to find them.

Knowing that Matt's home was wherever he happened to be when night overtook him, I felt some curiosity to see the place he had chosen for his temporary abode. I was ushered into it early on the afternoon of the following day. It was located about twenty miles from the pond, and Matt reached it by turning the scow out of the creek, and forcing him through a little stream whose channel was so thickly filled with bushes and weeds that a stranger would not have suspected that there was any water-way there. The stream, which was not

more than twenty feet long, ended in a little bay, and there the scow had to be left, because his crew could not take him any farther. He was too broad of beam to be carried through the thick woods, and besides he was too heavy.

I forgot to say that my new owner, Jake Coyle, navigated me up the creek. He was very awkward with the double paddle at first, but skill came with practice, and before we had gone half a dozen miles I was carrying him along as steadily and evenly as I ever carried Joe Wayring. When we reached the little bay of which I have spoken, Jake ran me upon the beach alongside the scow, and set to work to take me to pieces. Having more mechanical skill and patience than his father, he succeeded after awhile, and then he put me on his shoulder and carried me along the well-beaten path that led to the camp. But before this happened I was witness to a little proceeding on the part of Matt Coyle which showed what a cunning old fox he was. Catching up a long pole that had probably been used for the same purpose before, the squatter went back to the stream through which we had just

passed, and carefully straightened up all the bushes that had been bent down by the weight of the scow.

"There!" said Matt, when he had finished his task, "Swan an' some more of them guides will be along this way directly, but I bet they won't see nothin' from the creek to tell 'em that we are in here. Of course the bresh don't stand up squar', like it oughter, an' the bark's rubbed off in places; but mebbe Swan an' the rest of 'em won't take notice of that."

I afterward learned, however, that Matt knew his enemies too well to trust any thing to luck. Some member of his family stood guard at the mouth of the stream day and night. The old woman was on watch when we came up the creek but I did not see her, for as soon as she discovered Matt's scow approaching she hastened to camp to get dinner ready.

The camp was pleasantly located in a thicket of evergreens, and with a little care and attention might have been made a very cheerful and inviting spot; but it was just the reverse of that. Matt and his tribe were too lazy to keep their camps in order or to provide themselves

with any comforts. I never knew them to have such a thing as a camp broom, which any of them could have made in ten minutes, and I doubt if their dishes ever received a thorough washing. They could not muster up energy enough to pick browse for their beds, but were content to sleep on the bare ground. All they cared for was a camp that was so effectually concealed that the Indian Lake guides would not be likely to stumble upon it, a lean-to that would keep off the thickest of the rain, and plenty to eat. Of course they would have been glad to have money in their pockets, but they did not want to put themselves to any trouble to earn it. Matt contended that he and his family had as good a right to live without work as some other folks had.

"So you got your canvas canoe back, did you, Jakey?" said the old woman, as her hopeful son came in at one side of the camp and went out at the other. "Where did you find him agin?"

"Up there to the pond," replied Jake. "That Joe Wayring, he was fishin', an' we crep' up clost to him afore he knew we was

there, an' then it would a made you laugh to see him take to the water an' streak it through the woods with pap arter him. Don't I wish he had ketched him, though? Do you see any thing onto my face?"

The old woman replied that one of his cheeks was slightly discolored.

"Joe Wayring done that with pap's paddle," continued Jake, "an' I'm goin' to larrup him for it the first good chance I get. I'll l'arn him who he's hittin'. Yes, this canoe is mine now, sure enough, for pap give him to me to keep. I'm goin' to hide him out here in the bresh till I want to use him."

This piece of strategy on the part of my new master made it impossible for me to take note of all that happened in and around the squatter's camp during the next two days, for the evergreens partially concealed it from my view, and Matt and his allies talked in tones so low that I could not distinctly hear what they said; but on the afternoon of the third day I saw and heard a good deal. About three o'clock, while Sam Coyle was dozing on the bank of the creek and pretending to sta-

guard over the camp, he was suddenly aroused to a sense of his responsibility by seeing a light skiff come slowly around the bend below. Mr. Swan, the guide, handled the oars, and the man who sat in the stern was the owner of the Lefever hammerless that Matt Coyle had stolen and concealed in the bushes. They kept their eyes fastened upon the bank as they moved along, and Sam knew that they were looking for "signs."

"An' I'm powerful 'feared that they will find some when they get up here," thought the young vagabond, trembling all over with excitement and apprehension, "'cause didn't pap say that he couldn't make the bresh stand up straight like it had oughter do, an' that the bark was rubbed off in places? I reckon I'd best be a lumberin'."

Sam turned upon his face and crawled off through the bushes, but not until he had seen Mr. Swan's boat reinforced by four others, whose occupants were looking so closely at the shores as they advanced that it did not seem possible that a single bush, or even a twig on them, could escape their scrutiny. Sam

lost no time in putting himself out of sight among the evergreens, and then he jumped to his feet and made for camp at the top of his speed. The pale face he brought with him told his father that he had a startling report to make.

"Be they comin'?" said Matt, in an anxious whisper.

"Yes," replied Sam, "they're comin'—a hul passel of boats, an' two or three fellers into each one of 'em. The man you hooked that scatter-gun from is into Swan's boat, an' he looks like he was jest ready to b'ile over with madness."

"Grab something an' run with it," exclaimed the squatter; and as he spoke he snatched up the frying-pan and dumped the half-cooked slices of bacon upon the ground.

For a few minutes there was a great commotion in the camp. Matt and his family caught up whatever came first to their hands, and presently emerged from the thicket, one after the other. They all carried bundles of something on their backs, and at once proceeded to "scatter like so many quails," and scurry

away in different directions. This was one of their favorite tricks—the one to which they invariably resorted when danger threatened them ; but before they separated they always agreed upon a place of meeting, toward which they bent their steps as soon as they thought it safe to do so. It was no trouble at all for them to elude the officers of the law in this way, and even the guides, experienced as they were in woodcraft, could not always follow them.

Jake Coyle was so heavily loaded down with other plunder that he could not carry me away with him. That was something upon which I congratulated myself, for I was sure that the guides and their companions would not leave until they had made a thorough examination of the woods surrounding the squatter's camp; but in this I was disappointed.

They set fire to every thing that Matt had left behind in his hurried flight, and went back to the bay to find that the enemy had been operating in their rear. While they were waiting for the fire they had kindled to burn itself out, Matt and his family "circled

around" to the bay in which they had left their scow, and went to work to pay Mr. Swan back in his own coin. Every thing that would sink was thrown into the water, and every thing that wouldn't was sent whirling through the air toward the woods on the opposite side of the bay. That was the way my friend Fly-rod got crippled. He brought up against a tree with such force that his second joint was broken close to the ferrule. After doing all the damage they could without alarming the guides, Matt and his family took two of the best boats and made their escape in them.

I judged that Mr. Swan and his party were a pretty mad lot of men when they returned to the bay and saw what had been done there during their absence. They were so far away that I could not catch all they said, but I could hear Joe Wayring's voice, and longed for the power to do something that would lead him to my place of concealment. I also heard the owner of the stolen Winchester say:

"We will give a hundred dollars apiece to the man who will find our weapons, capture

the thief, and hold him so that we can come and testify against him. Or, we will give fifty dollars apiece for the guns without the thief and the same amount for the thief without the guns. Boys, you are included in that offer."

I knew that the last words were addressed to Joe Wayring and his chums, for I heard Arthur thank him, and say that it would afford him and his friends great satisfaction if they could find and restore the stolen guns. I did not suppose that the boys would ever think of the matter again, having so many other things to occupy their minds; but subsequent events proved that I was mistaken.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE WATCHMAN'S CABIN.

MR. SWAN and his party started for Indian Lake at an early hour the next morning, and I was left alone in the bushes. I stayed there all that night and until noon the next day, and then Jake Coyle and his brother suddenly appeared in front of my hiding-place. They came up so silently that I did not know they were anywhere in the neighborhood until they were close upon me: but I was not much surprised at that, for I had become well enough acquainted with them during my previous captivity to know that that was their usual way of doing. They could not have taken more pains to conceal their movements if they had been hostile Indians on the hunt for scalps.

They always had the fear of the law before their eyes, and lived in a state of anxiety and apprehension that could hardly have been endured by any one else.

"Here he is, all right an' tight," said Jake, laying hold of the rope with which he had tied me together and hauling me out of the thicket. "Ole Swan didn't go to pokin' around through the bresh like I was afeared he would. Come out here. You've got to help me steal some more bacon an' 'taters to-night."

"Don't you let Joe Wayring an' the rest of them fellers sneak up an' take him away from you, like they done the last time you went out with him to steal bacon an' 'taters," cautioned Sam. "Them boys ain't gone home yet, an' I shan't rest easy till they do. As long as they stay snoopin' around in these woods where they ain't wanted they're liable to drop down on us at any minute."

"I don't want 'em to go home till I get a chance to squar' up with Joe for hittin' me in the face with pap's paddle," said Jake, who seemed to think that a greater insult could not have been put upon him. "I shall allers remember that agin him. Now le's go back to our ole camp an' see what Swan an' his crowd done there arter we left."

So saying Jake led the way into the ever-

greens, carrying me on his shoulder. A single glance at the place where the camp had been was enough to show that the guides had done their work well. There was nothing left of the lean-to, the bedding, and the small supply of provisions that Matt and his family had abandoned, except a little pile of ashes.

"This is a purty way for them rich folks to treat poor chaps like us, ain't it?" said Sam, bitterly. "What business did they have to go an' do it? We've just as much right to be guides here as Swan has."

"Well, I don't reckon him an' his crowd hurt us any wuss than we hurt them," observed Jake. "Them fish-poles an' other things that we flung into the bresh an' sunk in the bay must have cost a good many dollars, an' we've got two of their best boats besides."

"But them boats won't do us any more good than the two guns we've got hid in the bresh," answered Sam. "Le's go an' take a look at them guns an' see if they are all right."

The hollow log in which the stolen weapons had been stowed away for safe keeping was at least a quarter of a mile from the thicket that

had furnished me with a hiding-place, but Jake and his brother went straight to it; and after removing a few bushes and chunks of wood that had been scattered carelessly around the end of the log to conceal the opening, the former put in his hand and pulled out a Victoria case which contained the Lefever hammerless. Passing it over to his brother, Jake again thrust his arm into the hollow and brought to light the stolen Winchester, wrapped in a tattered blanket. When their coverings were removed I took a good look at them. They were the handsomest things in the shape of guns I ever saw, and I did not wonder that their rightful owners were so anxious to get them back.

"If we had a few ca'tridges to fit 'em, we'd take a shot or two jest for luck," said Sam, raising the double-barrel to his shoulder and running his eye along the clean brown tubes. "But they ain't no more use to us than so many chunks of ole iron. We dassent sell 'em, an' pap' won't let us have 'em for fear that we will be took up for thieves."

"Didn't you hear pap say that he didn't hook the guns 'cause he wanted 'em, but jest

to break up guidin' an' ruin them hotels up to the lake?" Jake inquired. "It's the only way we've got to even up with the folks that are tryin' to starve us out, ain't it? I'll go furder'n that, if I ever get a good chance. I'll burn every camp I find, like Swan done with our'n."

"I reckon that if me an' you had the money these guns cost we could wear good clothes an' live on good grub all the rest of the year, couldn't we?" said Sam, as he returned the Lefever hammerless to his case and handed it to his brother. "They must have cost as much as forty or fifty dollars apiece, don't you reckon?"

This showed that Sam had about as clear an idea of the price of fine guns as his father had of the value of split bamboo fishing-rods and German-silver reels. The Winchester was worth fifty dollars, but the list price of the Lefever hammerless was three hundred.

Having put the guns back into the log again, Jake once more raised me to his shoulder, and started off through the woods. But he and Sam moved with long, noiseless steps, stopping

frequently to reconnoiter the ground before them, and if they conversed at all it was in low and guarded tones. At the end of half an hour they struck a "carry"—a dim path leading from the pond to another body of water that lay deeper in the forest—and here they became doubly cautious in their movements.

"Now you toddle on ahead," said Jake to his brother, "an' if you see one of them city chaps an' his guide comin' along the carry, fetch a little whistle so't I can hide in the bresh afore they see me."

But, as it happened, this precaution was unnecessary. The carry was deserted by all save themselves, and at the end of another half hour Jake took me through a little clearing and into a dilapidated log shanty, where we found the squatter and his wife waiting for us.

"Well, Jakey, you found your boat whar you left him, didn't you?" said Matt Coyle, as the boy deposited me in a corner of the shanty near the wide fire-place. "I didn't know but mebbe Swan an' the rest of 'em had nosed him out an' took him off."

"Well, they didn't," answered Jake. "We found him all right, an' the guns, too. We hauled 'em out an' took a good look at 'em, me an' Sam did. It's a mean shame that we can't keep 'em out an' use 'em like they b'longed to us."

The squatter made no reply, and I had leisure to look about me before any one spoke again. I was surprised to see how much furniture there was in the shanty, for I knew that Matt had lost the bulk of his property when the guides burned his camp. Of course, it was of the rudest description, but it would answer very well when nothing better could be had. I have seen many a well-appointed camp whose owners were not any better supplied with needful things than Matt Coyle was. There were two comfortable looking shake-downs on the floor; three-legged stools and chairs without any backs were abundant; the home-made table supported more dishes than Matt and his family were ever likely to fill with provender, and under it were piled a lot of miscellaneous articles, including a frying-pan, camp-kettle, and coffee-pot. To complete

the picture, three of the stools and broken chairs were occupied by Matt Coyle, his wife, and a roughly dressed man whom I had never seen before. They were all smoking, and sat with their elbows resting on their knees. Taken as a group, they were the laziest looking lot I ever happened to meet. The stranger was the first to speak.

"What guns is them you're talkin' about?" said he, in a drawling tone.

"Oh, they're some that I picked up while I was a roamin' around," replied Matt, with a knowing wink.

"An' you got that there canvas canoe in the same way, I reckon," continued the stranger, nodding toward the corner in which I lay, listening to the conversation.

"Well, p'raps I did," answered Matt. "It's jest like I told you, Rube. I would be willin' to work hard an' faithful if they would only give me a chance to be a guide, but they won't do it, an' me an' the boys have set ourselves the job of bustin' up the hul business. We've done right smart of damage already, but we ain't through yet. I'll bet you there won't be

as many guests up to them hotels at Injun Lake next summer as there was this."

"I heared all about it, an' about them guns, too," drawled Rube. "Do you know that there's been a big reward offered fur 'em? Well, there has. The man who ketches you an' finds the guns will get two hundred dollars for it; an' if he finds the guns without ketchin' you he'll get half as much."

"That's enough to turn every man in the woods agin me," said Matt, anxiously.

"All except your friends," Rube hastened to assure him. "They won't go agin you for no money."

"Well, I'll bet you they don't ketch me agin," said the squatter, confidently. "They done it once, but I'm onto their little games now. They thought they had us all in their grip, Swan an' his crowd did, when they burned our camp up there in the cove; but we knowed they was comin' long afore they got there. I ain't afeared of their ketchin' me."

"An' I ain't afeared of their findin' the guns nuther," chimed in Jake. "They're hid

where nobody wouldn't never think of lookin' for 'em."

"Whereabouts is that?" asked Rube, carelessly.

The boys grinned, while Matt and the old woman looked down at the floor and said nothing. They were perfectly willing that Rube should know how the guns came into their possession, but they were not so ready to tell him where the stolen weapons were concealed. How did they know but that Rube, tempted by the promise of so large a reward, would hunt up the guns, restore them to their lawful owners, and hold fast to all the money he received for it? Perhaps we shall see that that was just what Rube wanted to do. He was by no means as good a friend to the squatter as he pretended to be, and Matt suspected it all the while.

"What made you turn agin them folks up there to the lake?" said the latter, suddenly. "The last time I seen you, you told me that you had a good job at guidin', an' that you was gettin' two an' a half a day."

"So I did, an' it was the truth," replied

Rube. "But he didn't stick to his bargain, Hanson didn't. The last feller I went out with told him that I was a powerful lazy chap, an' that I wouldn't do nothin' but jest roll around on the grass an' leave him to pick the browse for the beds an' cook his own bacon an' slapjacks. He told him, furder, that I wouldn't take him to the best troutin' places, 'cause there was too many 'carries' in the way. Well, that was a fact," added Rube, reflectively. "He had so much duffle with him, my employer did, that I had to make two trips to tote it all over the carries, an' two an' a half a day is too little money for doin' sich work as that. I hired myself out to the hotel for a guide, an' not for a pack-horse. So Hanson, he allowed he didn't want me no longer, an' that made me down on him an' all the rest, same as you are. If that ain't a fact, an' if I ain't a friend of your'n, what made me tell you to come into my shanty an' make yourselves to home, an' use my things till you could get some furnitur' of your own?"

So that was the way Matt came to be so well fixed, was it? The shanty and every thing in

it belonged to Rube, and he had told Matt to step in and make himself at home there. I thought that looked like a friendly act on Rube's part.

"It was mighty good-natur'd an' free-hearted in you, an' if it ever comes handy, you'll see that I don't forget sich things," said Matt, after a little pause. "I'm free to say that I didn't look fur no sich favors from you, for I thought you was down on me, like all the rest of the guides."

"Well, you see that I ain't, don't you? I've been mistreated same as you have, an' have jest as good a reason to be mad about it. Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you consarnin' them guns that you've got hid in the bresh," continued Rube. "You dassent sell 'em or give 'em back to the men you stole 'em from, 'cause if you try it you will be took up; but I can do it for you, an' they won't never suspicion any thing agin me. I can take 'em up to Hanson to-day an' get the hunderd dollars cash money that has been promised for 'em. Say the word an' I'll do it, an' go halves with you. Fifty dollars is better

than leavin' 'em out there in the woods to rust till they ain't good for nothing."

This seemed to be a fair offer, and I expected to hear Matt close with it at once; but instead of that he fastened his eyes on the floor once again, and drew his shaggy brows together as if he were thinking deeply. Even Jake went off into a brown study.

"If you want to make any thing out of them guns, I don't see any other way for you to do it," said Rube, knocking the ashes from his pipe and getting upon his feet. "I'll make the same bargain with you consarnin' them two boats you hooked from Swan an' his crowd on the day they burned your camp. You can't use them any more'n you can use the guns, an' what's the use of leavin' 'em in the bresh to rot away to nothin'?"

"An' what's the use of my robbin' camps if I'm goin' to give back all the things I hook?" asked Matt, in reply.

"You needn't give 'em all back—only jest them that you can get a reward for. Take time to study on it, an' then tell me if you don't think I have made you a good offer.

Now I must step down to the hatchery an' go on watch ; an' I warn you, fair an' squar', don't none of you come prowlin' round like you was waitin' for a chance to set fire to the buildin's or cut the nets, 'cause if you do I shall have to tell on you. I shouldn't like to do that, bein' as me an' you is friends, an' nuther do I want to lose my place as watchman at the hatchery, since I've been stopped from guidin'. I must have some way to make a livin'."

So saying Rube put on his hat and left the shanty. Matt and his family remained silent and motionless for a few minutes, and then, in obedience to a sign from his father, Jake jumped up and followed Rube. After a brief absence he returned with the report:

"He ain't hangin' around the back of the shanty to listen to our talk, Rube ain't. He's gone on down the carry t'wards the hatchery. Be you goin' to let him have them boats an' guns, pap? Seems like it would be better to have the money than the things, 'cause we could use the money an' we can't use the boats an' guns."

"Now jest listen at the blockhead!"

exclaimed Matt. "Do you reckon that if we give the things up to Rube we'd ever see a cent of the money? Do you think that 'cause he opened this shanty to us, an' told us to use his dishes to cook our grub with, that it's safe to trust him too fur? I don't. Them boats an' guns can stay where they be till they sp'ile afore I will let Rube or any body else make any money out of 'em. Nobody but me run any risk in hookin' them guns, an' I'm the one that oughter have the money for givin' of 'em back."

"I don't b'lieve Rube's goin' agin us," said the old woman. "If that is his idee, what's the reason he don't bring the constable here an' have you took up? He could do it in a minute."

"Now jest listen at you!" said Matt, again. "Of course he could have me took up if he wanted to, Rube could, but he would make only a hundred dollars by it, 'cause he wouldn't have the guns. See? But if we give him the guns, then he'll bring the constable here arter me, an' he'll get two hundred dollars fur it. Understand? I don't b'lieve that every body

up to the lake is down on him like they be on me. If he was stopped from guidin', how does it come that he got to be watchman at the State hatchery? They wouldn't have no lazy, good-for-nothing feller there, I bet you. There's something mighty jubus about Rube, an' you want to be careful what you say an' do afore him, the hul on you. It won't do to trust nobody 'ceptin' ourselves. Now, Sam, you start up the fire, an', ole woman, you put what's left of them bacon an' 'taters over. We'll have more to-morrer, if Jakey has good luck to-night."

While the preparations for supper were in progress, Matt filled his pipe for a fresh smoke, Sam sat on his stool and meditated, and Jake disappeared down the carry with his fish-pole on his shoulder. Rube's proposition had suggested an idea to him and he, too, was thinking deeply. He went straight to the hatchery, and after watching the carry for a few minutes to make sure that he had not been followed by any member of the family Jake peeped around the corner of one of the buildings and saw Rube in conversation with the superintendent. The

latter went away after a little while, and then Jake presented himself before the watchman.

"Didn't I warn you, fair an' squar', that you mustn't none of you come prowlin' about here?" demanded Rube, angrily. "Now clear yourself or I'll tell on you, sure."

"You ain't got nothing to tell, 'cause I ain't done no damage of no sort," answered Jake, with a grin.

"But I wouldn't be afeared to bet that you're goin' to. I wouldn't trust none of you as fur as I could sling a meetin' house. No, I wouldn't."

"Well, pap said he wouldn't trust you nuther, so I reckon we're about even on that p'int," said Jake with another grin.

"What for wouldn't he trust me?" asked Rube, in an astonished tone.

"'Cause he says you think you are mighty smart, tryin' to get them fine guns into your own hands so't you can pocket the hul of the reward an' never give us none of it. That's what you're up to, Rube, an' we know it."

"Tain't nuther," said the man, indignantly.

"Well, you can't never make nothing by

coaxin' pap to give up them guns; I can tell you that much. Say," added Jake, drawing a step or two nearer to Rube and speaking in low and confidential tones, "you won't never tell nobody if I say something to you, will you?"

"No, I won't," replied Rube, lowering his own voice almost to a whisper.

"You won't never tell pap nor mam nor Sam, nor none of 'em, honor bright an' sure hope to die?"

"No, I won't," repeated Rube.

"Say honor bright; 'cause if you ever let on to Sam what I say to you, he'll tell pap, an' pap, he'll wear a hickory out on me."

"Honor bright I won't tell," said Rube.

"Say," whispered Jake. "I've done a heap fur pap fust an' last, an' he ain't never give me nothin' fur it, 'ceptin' that ole canvas canoe I brung home to-day. I sold them poles that he stole from Joe Wayring an' his crowd down on Sherwin's pond, an' he never once said to me: 'Jakey, here's a couple of dollars to buy you a pair of shoes agin winter comes.' Now I say that was mighty stingy in pap. He says

them guns may stay where they be till they sp'ile, afore you or any body 'ceptin' himself shall make any money outen 'em."

Jake could see by the way Rube hung his head that he was sorry to hear this. After a long pause he looked up and said:

"Well, what of it?"

"Well," continued Jake, "I can't see the use of them guns layin' there doin' nobody no good, when I might jest as well have the reward that's been offered fur 'em."

"No more do I," assented Rube.

"Say," Jake went on, in a still lower whisper, "I'll tell you where the guns be if you will give me half the money an' never let on to none of 'em that I told you."

"It's a bargain," said Rube, extending his hand.

"An' you'll give me the fifty dollars, right into my own fingers, an' keep still about it afterwards?"

"I will."

"Say. 'Twouldn't be safe fur me to show you where the guns is hid, 'cause the old man is like Joe Wayring an' the rest of them fel-

lers. He's got a habit of snoopin' around where he ain't wanted, an' jest as like's not he'd see me while I was a showin' you ; so I'll have to tell you. Say ! You know where the creek is that leads—Wait a minute."

When Jake had said this much it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps his father was at that very moment "snoopin' around" where he was not wanted, and he thought it best to satisfy himself on that point. He was pretty certain that he would see trouble if any member of his family caught him in close conversation with the watchman. It was well for Jake that he took this precaution, for when he looked cautiously around the corner of the building he discovered a familiar figure coming down the carry with long and rapid strides. It was plain that he was fearful of being seen and followed, for he stopped every few rods to look behind him.

"There comes that Sam of our'n," said Jake, in an excited whisper. "Now, Rube, you watch an' see which end of the buildin' he's p'inting fur, an' I'll slip around t'other end an' make a break fur home through the bresh.

Say, Rube, don't let on, an' I'll see you some other day."

Jake caught up his fish-pole, which he had leaned against the side of the hatchery, and stood ready to run in either direction, while Rube moved slowly along the bank of the outlet until he could see the carry.

"Now, then!" he exclaimed, as soon as Sam came within speaking distance, "you ain't wanted here, nor none of your tribe. So toddle right back where you come from." At the same time he made a quick motion with his hand, which Jake saw and understood. He darted around the upper end of the building and was out of sight in an instant.

"You heared me, I reckon," continued Rube, seeing that Sam quickened his pace instead of turning about and retracing his steps.

"You can't fish here, 'cause it's agin the law, an' you might as well understand it first as last. Want to speak to me? Hurry up, then, for I ain't got no time to fool away."

Imagine the watchman's surprise when he learned that Sam had come there with the same proposition that his brother had made him a

few minutes before. He gave the very same reasons for it, made the same stipulations regarding the division of the reward, and exacted the same promise of secrecy; but he did not tell Rube where the guns were concealed. Just as he got to that point a step sounded within the superintendent's room, and a hand was laid upon the latch. Before the door opened Sam, who had reasons of his own for not wishing to meet the superintendent face to face, had vanished in the fast-gathering twilight.

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

"I DON'T see no trout to go with the bacon an' 'taters that your ma is cookin' fur supper," observed Matt Coyle, who was sitting in the doorway of the shanty smoking his pipe. "You don't often come back without something to show fur your time an' trampin'."

"No, 'cause I don't often have a watchman to tell me that I shan't fish where I please," replied Jake, as he leaned his pole against one end of the cabin and disappeared through the door. "Rube's down there to the hatchery, an' he's mighty pertic'lar fur a man who says he's down on every body, same as we be."

"Don't you b'lieve a word of that story," said Matt, earnestly. "'Cause if you do, you will get into trouble, sure's you're a foot high. There ain't a word of truth in it."

"Then what made him tell it?" asked Jake.

"I don't know, less'n he's been sent out by Hanson or some of the summer boarders to keep an eye on us," answered Matt. "I b'lieve that if he could find them guns he'd have the hul kit an' bilin' of us 'rested before mornin'. See Sam anywhere?"

Jake replied that he had not.

"Well, he's went up there too, I reckon, 'cause I saw him goin' off with his pole onto his shoulder. He'll come pokin' back directly."

"I know he went up to the hatchery," said Jake, to himself. "An' that's what bothers me. He knows well enough that Rube wouldn't let him drop a line into the water, so what did he go up there fur? I do think in my soul that Sam will bear a little watchin'."

"There's something mighty strange an' curious 'bout them two boys of our'n goin' up to the outlet to fish when they know'd that the watchman was there," thought Matt. "'Tain't like them at all, that way of doin' ain't, an' it's my opinion that they are up to something. Well, if they can get the start

of their pap they're smarter than I think they be."

Up to this time Matt and his family had had perfect confidence in one another. What one knew the others knew. If their domestic life had not been altogether harmonious, they had at least managed to get on very well together, and had stood shoulder to shoulder against the common foe—the landlords and guides, who were determined to drive them out of the country. But Rube's offer to return the stolen property Matt had in his possession and divide the reward had changed all that. The rogues had not yet fallen out with one another, but they were in a fair way to do so, and when that happened honest men were likely to get their dues. It was not long before a series of incidents occurred which brought about an open rupture.

By the time Sam made his appearance, supper was ready. The boys, who were usually talkative, had nothing to say while the meal was in progress, and that was enough to confirm Matt's suspicions.

"They've got something on their minds,

both of 'em, an' I know it," said he, to himself. "Jakey, have you made up your decision where you're goin' to get some grub fur us?" he added, aloud.

Jake replied that he had not given the matter a moment's thought. He intended to do as he had always done—stop at the first house he came too, and if he found dogs there, or the smokehouse too strongly fastened, he would go on to the next."

"I don't reckon I shall be back much afore mornin'," said he. "We're a mighty fur ways from where any guides live, an' I may have to go cl'ar to Injun Lake afore I can get any grub."

"Then you'll get ketched sure," said the old woman.

"Hadn't you better take Sam along to help?" inquired Matt.

"No, I won't," answered Jake, promptly. "He'd be that skeared that he wouldn't dare leave the boat; so what help would he be to me, I'd like to know. I don't want him along."

Jake had always refused to permit his

brother to accompany him on his numerous foraging expeditions, and Matt had never thought any thing of it until this particular night; but now his refusal made him distrust Jake. He believed that the boy had private reasons for wishing to go on his dangerous errand alone, and told himself that it might be a good plan to follow him and see where he went and what he did while he was gone. So when Jake, after eating his share of the bacon and potatoes, hauled me out of the corner and left the cabin without saying a word to any body his father got upon his feet, paused long enough to fill his pipe, and also went out into the darkness. He did not follow Jake very far, however, because his inherent laziness proved stronger than his lack of confidence in the boy, and, besides, the latter did not do any thing out of the way. He held straight for Deer Lake outlet, but instead of following the trail he struck off through the woods, avoiding the hatchery and the watchman who kept guard over it. Then Matt turned about and went back to the shanty, while Jake launched the canvas canoe and

boldly set out on his dangerous mission. I have often wondered at the nerve the young reprobate displayed in going off alone on these midnight plundering expeditions. He seemed to think no more of it than you would of going fishing. On this particular night Jake was not lonesome, for he had some very agreeable thoughts for company; and as he communed aloud with them I learned, somewhat to my surprise, that he had hopes and aspirations as well as some other boys of my acquaintance.

"I tell you I have lived this way about long enough," soliloquized Jake, as he headed me across the outlet and paddled slowly along close to the shore and in the shadow of the overhanging trees. "If I'm ever goin' to be any body an' make any money, now's my time to begin. So long as I stay with pap, jest so long will I be hounded an' drove about from pillar to post by them guides an' landlords, who won't let me stay nowhere. I jest know that pap's goin' to see trouble all along of them guns that he's got hid in the bresh, but I can't see why I should be 'rested too. I didn't hook the guns, an' that's what made me

talk to Rube the way I did. If he will go halvers with me on the reward, I'll get fifty dollars, an' that will be enough so't I can start out on my own hook. If Rube wants to earn the extra hundred by havin' pap 'rested arterwards—why, that's something I can't help. I've got a good boat, one that I can tote anywhere through the woods, an' what's to hender me from strikin' out fur myself this winter? I know where to go to find good trappin' grounds, an' I'll bet that when spring comes I'll have more money than I will if I stay hangin' round here with pap. I ain't goin' to be shut up in jail for something I didn't do, an' that's all there is about *that*."

Jake continued to talk to himself in this way during the whole of the hour and a half that it took him to paddle from the mouth of the outlet to the landing in front of the first house above the hatchery. I could not see that there was any dwelling there, for the night was pitch dark; but Jake knew where he was, and I learned from some snatches of his soliloquy which I overheard that the guide to whom the premises belonged was a thrifty man and a

good provider for his family. If he could only get into his smokehouse or effect an entrance into his cellar, Jake was sure that he could load his canoe without the least trouble. As the guide was neither a "cruster" nor a "skin-butcher," he did not keep dogs, but he had a stalwart son who took care of the little farm during his father's absence, and Jake knew that he would see fun if that boy heard him prowling around.

Jake did not make the painter fast to any thing, for he did not want to lose time in casting it off in case he were called upon to make a hasty retreat. He simply drew me part way out of the water, so that I would not float off with the current, and after that threw a couple of bags over his shoulder and disappeared in the bushes. Then began that series of incidents to which I referred a little while ago, and which not only brought about an open rupture in Matt Coyle's family, but broke it up as completely as the guides and landlords could have wished. I heard all about them before I was stowed away in Joe Wayring's bedroom to await the coming of the next boating

season, and consequently I am able to describe them to you in the order in which they occurred.

Jake's first care, when he reached the clearing, was to give the house a good looking over in order to make sure that all the inmates had gone to bed. He could not see a light in any of the windows, and neither could he hear any one moving about on the inside. He did not look for enemies outside the house, and consequently he did not see the two dark figures that sprang quickly behind a corner of the cellar the moment he came into view. But the figures were there, and they saw every thing Jake did.

Having satisfied himself that the family had all retired, Jake made his way to the cellar, which was not built under the house, but fifty yards in the rear of it. It was a square hole in the ground, walled up with logs instead of stone, and covered with a peaked roof to shed the rain. Four steps led down to the door, which Jake found to be fastened with a padlock. But he expected to find it so, and had come prepared for it. He drew from one of the

bags a long iron strap, like those that sometimes are used for hanging heavy doors, thrust one end of it under the hasp and, with a sudden jerk, pulled out the nearest staple. This being done, the door swung open of its own accord, and Jake went into the cellar.

Not a single ray of light came in at the door, and Jake, having neglected to bring with him a supply of matches, was obliged to grope about in the dark. He wasn't searching for any thing in particular. He did not care what he found, so long as it was something that was good to eat, and with such articles the cellar appeared to be abundantly stocked. He found a generous piece of bacon, half a bushel of potatoes, as many turnips, a small crock of butter, and several jars of pickles, all of which he bundled into his bag without the least regard for order or neatness. His sole duty was to forage for provisions ; it was no concern of his how the things looked when he got them home.

"I reckon I've got about all I can tote down to the boat at one load, an' so I'll quit," said Jake, moving his hand along the hanging-

shelf to make sure that he had found all the things that had been placed upon it. "If them folks of our'n want any more grub they can steal it theirselves, fur I am getting tired of the—Well, I do think in my soul. What's that?"

As Jake shouldered his well-filled bags he turned toward the door, only to find it blocked by the two figures who had sought concealment behind the cellar. They had come down the steps so cautiously that Jake did not know there was any one near him. Of course he was greatly alarmed, and visions of the New London penitentiary rose up before him; for Jake knew very well that nocturnal house-breaking, with the intent to commit a felony, constitutes burglary, and burglary is a State's prison offense. The light was so dim that he could not see the features of the men who blocked the doorway and cut off his escape, but beyond a doubt one of them must be the son of the guide he had robbed.

"I couldn't help it, Ike, sure's I live an' breathe I couldn't help it, stammered Jake,

as soon as he could speak. "We ain't got a bite to eat in the shanty, an' no way to earn any, seein' that the folks about here won't let us be guides and make an honest livin', like we want to do. I'll give up every thing I've got into the bags if—"

"Keep your plunder, friend," said a voice that Jake did not remember to have heard before. "We don't own it, and neither are we officers. We don't care how much you steal. Where's your boat?"

"Down to the beach," replied Jake, who thought this a little ahead of any thing he had ever heard of before.

"Well, do you want to earn five dollars?" asked the man, in hurried tones. "Then shoulder your bags again and come on. We want you to set us across the lake."

Jake obeyed the order to "come on," but he did it with fear and trembling. How did he know but this was a ruse on the part of the two men to get him out of the cellar so that they could both pounce upon him? He followed them up the steps because he was afraid to hang back; but when he got to the top he

watched for an opportunity to throw down his bags and take to his heels. But first he took as good a look at the men as he could in the darkness. They both wore slouch hats and long dark-colored ulsters, and each carried a small traveling bag in his hand. In appearance, they were not unlike the sportsmen and tourists who patronized the Indian Lake hotels in summer. They tried to make Jake believe that that was what they were; but the boy was sharp enough to discover a flaw in their story at once.

"We've been spending a month up at the hotel hunting and fishing," said the one who had thus far done all the talking. "This afternoon we received a telegram urging our immediate return to New London, and we are trying to get there now."

"There ain't no huntin' up to Injun Lake this time of the year, 'cause it's agin the law," said Jake, to himself. "An' this ain't the best way to get to New London nuther, if they're in sich a hurry as they make out. Why didn't they hire a wagon to take 'em to the railroad? It's a mighty fur ways through

the woods," he added, aloud, "an' you won't get there half so quick as the cars could take you."

"It is too late to think about that now," was the rather impatient reply. "We've got started, and we can't waste time in going back. Can you set us across the lake?"

"I reckon," answered Jake. "But I shall have to carry you one at a time, 'cause my boat is small, an' won't hold up three fellers at a load."

While this conversation was going on Jake, who did not believe a word of the story to which he had listened, was watching for a chance to slip away in the darkness; but the men, as if divining his intention, walked one on each side of him, and even took hold of his arms to help him over the rough places. When they reached the woods one went on ahead and the other brought up the rear; so there was no opportunity for escape.

"There's the boat," said Jake, at length. "Now which one of you shall I take over first? An' where's that five dollars you promised me fur settin' you across?"

The men did not reply immediately. They struck matches on the sleeves of their ulsters and examined me closely, all the while keeping up an animated conversation in tones so low that I did not think Jake could hear it; but subsequent events proved that he heard every word of it, and knew how to profit by the information he gained from it. The course of action he instantly marked out for himself, and which he successfully carried into execution, astonished me beyond measure.

"Say, Jim," said one of the men, fumbling in his pocket for another match. "This is a cranky looking craft, and I am afraid to trust myself in her. We couldn't swim ten feet to save our lives, and both these gripsacks have specie enough in them to sink them to the bottom, if she should happen to capsize with us. Say, friend, how wide is the lake at this point?"

"About a mile—mebbe more," answered Jake.

"Is the water very deep?"

"Well, middlin' deep. On the day pap ketched a salmon trout here he let out seventy

foot of line an' never teched bottom. I reckon that's water enough to drown a feller, less'n he's a tolerable fine swimmer."

The men evidently thought so too. They held another consultation, and had almost made up their minds that the safest thing they could do would be to stay ashore and walk around the lake, when Jake broke in with—

"I'll tell you what I've heard pap say more'n once. If you are afeared that a boat is too cranky fur you, an' that she'll spill you out, all you've got to do is to load her down most to the water's edge, an' then she'll go along as stiddy as a rockin' cheer. The water ain't over your heads right here, an' if you don't like the look of things arter we all get in, why I can bring you back to shore mighty easy."

One of the men protested that the plan wouldn't work at all, but his more venturesome companion declared that it was worth trying, adding—

"We can't manage the canoe, and the boy will have to go. If he takes us over one at a

time, we shall lose valuable moments. Jump in, Jim. Where did you want to sit, boy? In the middle, I suppose?"

"I reckon," replied Jake. "But afore we start, I want to see the color of them five dollars you promised me for takin' you over."

The man who had been called Jim muttered an exclamation of impatience and opened his traveling bag, while his companion struck another match. By the aid of the light it threw out Jake caught a glimpse of the contents of the valise. It was a very brief one, but the sight on which his gaze rested during the instant that the match blazed up and then went out almost took his breath away. The little bag was filled to the very top with glittering silver pieces. Never but once in his life before had Jake Coyle seen so much money, and that was in the front window of a New London broker's office.

Jim caught up several of the coins, and as the light emitted by the match died away just then he counted out Jake's five dollars in the dark. But the boy knew they were all there, for he felt them as they were dropped into his

eager palm. He shut his fingers tightly upon them, and instead of putting them into his pocket he thrust them into the mouth of the sack that contained the bacon and potatoes he had stolen in the cellar.

"They might slip outen my pocket if we should happen to get capsized, but they'll be safe there," chuckled Jake. "T'other side of the lake is a mighty jubus place to land a canoe on a dark night like this one is, 'cause there's so many snags there to pester a feller."

"Now, then, what's keeping you?" demanded Jim, impatiently. "We've wasted too much time already."

"Well, why don't you pile in?" asked Jake, in reply. "I'll shove the canoe out till she floats, an' then I'll step in myself. I ain't afeared of gettin' my stockin's wet."

In accordance with these instructions Jim took possession of the bow, his companion seated himself in the stern, and Jake shoved me from the shore. When the water was a little more than knee-deep, he stepped aboard and took up his paddle. His added weight

made me settle down until the water came within two or three inches of the top of my gunwale, and I expected that Jake would stop and ask his passengers how they "liked the look of things" now that they were afloat; but he did nothing of the kind, for it was not on his programme to take them back to shore after he had got fairly started with them. He dipped his paddle into the water and with a few quick, strong strokes left the trees on the bank out of sight. If I could have spoken to them I could have quieted the fears of Jake's timid passengers in very few words. I did not believe that the three of them weighed much more than half my floating capacity, which was eight hundred pounds.

The lake wasn't an inch over five hundred yards wide at this point, and neither was the water more than fifteen or twenty feet deep. Jake was not more than ten minutes in coming within sight of the opposite shore, and then he began twisting about, looking first one side of his bow passenger and then the other, as if he were searching for something. The beach was, as he had said, a bad place to make a

landing on a dark night. In fact there was no beach there; nothing but a low, muddy shore, which was thickly lined with gnarled and twisted roots and sharp-pointed snags. It was a fine place for an accident, even in broad daylight; but Jake could have passed through in perfect safety if he had been so minded. Instead of that, he picked out the wickedest looking sawyer in the lot and headed me straight for it, with longer and stronger strokes. Jim, who was seated in the bow, could not see what he was doing, and the attention of the man who occupied the stern was so fully taken up with other matters (keeping his balance, for one) that he could not think of any thing else. While I was wondering what Jake was going to do, he ran my bow high and dry upon the leaning sawyer; and in less time than it takes to tell it I rolled completely over, and came right side up, turning Jake and his passengers out into the cold waters of the lake.

"Human natur'!" sputtered Jake, who was the first to rise to the surface. "What's the matter with you feller in the bow? Why

didn't you tell me that the snag was there, so't I could have kept cl'ar of it?"

I knew now what Jake Coyle's plan was, and felt the keenest anxiety for the two men who had been so unexpectedly dumped overboard, for I had heard them say that they could not swim ten feet to save their lives. But fortunately they could swim a little. Their heads bobbed up almost as quick as Jake's did, and as soon as they had taken in the situation, they struck out for the snag. They were greatly alarmed, although, as I afterward learned, there was not the slightest reason for it. If they had allowed their feet to sink toward the bottom, they would have found that the water at that place was not more than shoulder-deep.

"How could I be expected to act as lookout when I was sitting with my back to the front end of the boat?" demanded Jim, as soon as he could speak. "Where's my grip-sack?"

"And mine?" exclaimed his companion. "Boy, have you got 'em?"

"I ain't got nothin'," answered Jake. "Didn't you hold fast to 'em when the boat

capsized! Then they went to the bottom of the lake most likely, an' you won't never see 'em again, 'cause the water's more'n four hundred feet deep right here, an' the mud goes down a hundred feet furder."

I had floated off the sawyer the instant I was relieved of the weight of my three passengers, and the current, which at this point set pretty strongly toward the outlet, carried me within reach of Jake Coyle's arm. As he spoke, he gave me a sly but vigorous push, which sent me out of sight of the two men who were clinging to the sawyer, but not so far away but that I could hear every word they said. When they found that their valises had gone to the bottom, their fear gave place to rage, and they fell to abusing Jake and each other.

"I knew we would come to grief if we got into that canoe, but you insisted on it, and now you see what we have made by it," said one of the men after he had sworn himself out of breath. "How are we going to get to Canada when we haven't got five dollars between us? We've put ourselves in a fair way

of going to prison, and we haven't a thing to show for it."

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed the other, fiercely. "Do you want to give yourself away to this boy? Say, Tommy, or Julius, or whatever your name is, are you good at diving?"

"Never could dive wuth a cent," declared Jake, who often boasted that he could bring up bottom at a greater depth than any other boy in the State. "What do you reckon you want me to do—try to get them grip-sacks fur you? There ain't a livin' man can go down to the bottom of the mud where them things is by this time. Was there much into 'em?"

"*Was* there? Well, I should—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Jim. "We'll not give the money up until we have made an effort to recover it. We'll keep this boy with us until morning, and then we'll fix up some sort of a drag and see what we can do with it. I don't believe that the water is as deep—Here, you villain, what sort of a game have you been playing on us? The water isn't over five feet deep. I'm standing on bottom now."

"Wal, stand there long's you like," replied

Jake, who all this while had been holding fast to another snag a little distance away. "I won't charge you no rent fur it. You stole that there money somewheres, an' I know right where the constable lives. 'Twon't take me long—"

A vivid light shot out into the darkness, a water-proof cartridge cracked spitefully, and a bullet from Jim's revolver whistled dangerously near to Jake Coyle's head.

CHAPTER V.

JAKE COYLE'S SILVER MINE.

"HUMAN natur'!" yelled Jake, when the ball sung through the air close to his ear. "I'm shot! Whoop! I'm killed."

He let go his hold upon the snag and fell back into the water with a sounding splash; but rising with the buoyancy of a cork, and finding, to his astonishment, that he was not at all injured, he swam rapidly in my direction, but so silently that I could not hear the slightest ripple. The robbers, if such they were, were struck dumb by the alarming sounds that had been called forth by their random shot; but at length one of them broke the silence.

"I hope you're satisfied," said he, in savage tones. "You have added murder to burglary, and now we are in for it, sure. I'm off this very minute."

"Where are you going, Tony?" asked his companion, in pleading tones.

"I'm going to get ashore and strike out through the woods the best I know how. I don't care where I bring up, so long as I put a safe distance between myself and the guides who will be on our trail at daylight. They'll track a fellow down as a hound would."

"Are you going to desert me? I can't swim ashore."

"Then walk. The water isn't up to your neck."

"But the mud! What if it should be a quicksand?"

"The mud isn't an inch deep. That boy told us a pack of lies from beginning to end. He capsized us on purpose; but I am sorry you shot him. Come on, if you are going with me."

"Must we leave the money behind after all the risk we ran to get it?"

"The money can stay where it is till the rust eats it up for all I care," replied Tony, who was very much alarmed. "I wouldn't stay here a minute longer after what you have done for all the money there is in America."

"But there are six thousand dollars in those

grip-sacks," protested Jim, "and that amount of cash don't grow on every bush."

"I know it; but there's no help for it that I can see. You have knocked us out of a fortune by being so quick with your revolver."

Here the speaker broke out into a volley of the heaviest kind of oaths, and Jake Coyle sat composedly in the canvas canoe listening to him. The boy's courage came back to him the instant he found himself in the boat with the double paddle in his hand, and instead of making haste to return to the other shore, as I thought he would, he kept still and waited to see what his late passengers were going to do. Although he was not more than twenty yards from them they could not see him, for, as I have said, the night was pitch dark.

"I knowed by the way them fellers went snoopin' around that suller, an' by the funny story they tried to cram down my throat, that they wasn't sportsmen like they pertended to be," soliloquized Jake, giving himself an approving slap on the knee. "An' I knowed the minute I seed that money that it wasn't their'n, an' that's why I upsot 'em into the lake.

Whoop-pee! I've got a silver mind up there by that snag, an' to-morrer night I'll slip up an' work it."

Hardly able to control himself, so great was his delight over the success of his hastily conceived plans, Jake sat and listened while the robbers floundered through the water toward the shore; and when a crashing in the bushes told him that they had taken to the woods, he headed me for the place where he had left the stolen provisions. Six thousand dollars! Jake could hardly believe it. It was a princely fortune in his estimation, and it was all his own; for no one except himself and the robbers knew where it was, and the latter would not dare come after it, believing, as they did, that their chance shot had proved fatal to Jake. It would be an easy matter for the boy to bring the two grip-sacks to the surface by diving for them, but what should he do with the money after he got hold of it? Unless he went to some place where he was not known, it would be of no more use to him than those fine guns were to his father. There was but one store within a radius of fifty miles at which

he could spend any of it, and Jake knew it would not be safe to go there. The store was located at Indian Lake, and that was the headquarters of the guides who were so hostile to his father's family.

"It's a p'int that will need a heap of studyin' to straighten it out," thought Jake, putting a little more energy into his strokes with the double paddle. "But I'm rich, an' I needn't stop with pap no longer'n I've a mind to. That's a comfortin' idee. Wouldn't him an' Sam be hoppin' if they knowed what had happened to-night? I don't reckon I'd best have any thing more to say to Rube about them guns. I don't care for fifty dollars long's I got six thousand waitin' for me."

Jake found the bags where he had left them, and also the five dollars which the robbers had paid him for ferrying them across the lake. He loaded the bags into the canoe, after putting the money into his pocket, and set out for home, which he reached without any further adventure. He took a good deal of pains to avoid the watchman at the hatchery, although there was really no need of it. Rube knew

well enough that the food Matt's wife served up to him three times a day had never been paid for. The first words he uttered when he presented himself at the breakfast table the next morning proved as much.

"Beats the world how you folks keep yourselves in grub so easy," said he, as he drew one of the stools up to the well-filled board. "I never see you do no work, an' yet you never go hungry. Well, I don't know's it's any of my business; but I'd like mighty well to make it my business to 'rest them two robbers that's prowlin' about in these woods."

"What robbers?" inquired Matt; while Jake, taken by surprise, bent his head lower over his cracked plate and trembled in every limb.

"I don't know's I can give you any better idee of it than by readin' a little scrap in a paper that Swan give me early this morning," answered Rube, pushing back his stool and pulling the paper in question from his pocket.

"Swan!" ejaculated Matt, his face betraying the utmost consternation. "Has he been round here?"

Rube replied very calmly that the guide had been around there, adding—

"Him an' a whole passel of other guides an' constables come to see me this morning at the hatchery afore sun-up. They told me all about it an' give me this paper. They was a lookin' for the robbers."

"An' don't you know that they're lookin' for me too?" exclaimed Matt, reproachfully. "An you never come to wake me up so't I could take to the bresh an' hide? Spos'n I'd been ketched all along of your not bringin' me word?"

"But you see I knowed you wasn't in no danger," replied the watchman. "They wouldn't be likely to look for you in my house, an' me holdin' the position of watchman at the State hatchery, would they? Besides, they don't care for you now. They're after a bigger reward than has been offered for you. There's six hundred dollars to be made by 'restin' them robbers, an' that's what brung Swan an' his crowd up here so early. They tracked the robbers through the woods as far as Haskinses', Swan and the rest of the guides did, an' there they found a steeple

pulled outen the suller door an'—Hallo! What's the matter of you, Jake?"

"There ain't nothin' the matter of me as I knows on," said the boy, faintly.

"I thought you sorter acted like you was chokin'. Well, they routed up Haskinses' folks, an' when Miss Haskins come to go into the suller she said she had lost some 'taters, turnups, bacon, butter, and pickles," continued Rube; and as he said this he ran his eyes over the table and saw before him every one of the articles he had enumerated. "Miss Haskins allowed that the robbers must a bust open the door to get grub to eat while they was layin' around in the bresh. Mebbe they did an' mebbe they didn't; but that's nothin' to me. They couldn't track the robbers no furder'n the suller; but they're bound to come up with 'em, sooner or later. Townies ain't as good at hidin' in the woods as you be, Matt."

The squatter grinned his appreciation of the complaint, and Rube proceeded to unfold his paper. When he found the dispatch of which he was in search, he read it in a low monotone,

without any rising or falling inflection or the least regard for pauses. It ran as follows :

"BANK THIEVES GET $6,000.

"Irvington, Aug. 3.—The cashier of the First National Bank went to dinner about noon yesterday, after closing and locking the vault and doors of the building. Thieves entered the bank by a back door and secured about $6,000, mostly in specie, which had been left in trays just inside the iron railings. Two strangers wearing long dark coats and black felt hats were seen coming out of the alley about the time the money was supposed to have been stolen, and suspicion rests upon them. The sheriff is in hot pursuit, and the thieves have already been traced as far as Indian Lake. That is bad news. The Indian Lake vagabonds will give them aid and comfort as long as their money holds out, and the officers will have an all-winter's job to run them to earth. A reward of six hundred dollars has been offered for the apprehension of the robbers."

Rube folded the paper again and said, as he winked knowingly at Matt Coyle—

"You see that Swan and the rest of the guides have got bigger game than you to look after, an' if they've got an all-winter's job onto

their hands, you're safe, so fur as bein' took up is concerned; I mean that they won't go out of their way to hunt you up."

Having finished his breakfast Rube took possession of one of the shake-downs, while Matt and his family adjourned to the open air to give him a chance to sleep.

"The Injun Lake vagabones will give 'em aid an' comfort as long's their money holds out," quoted Matt, seating himself on a convenient log and knitting his shaggy brows as if he were revolving some deep problem in his mind. "That means us, I reckon; don't you? I'd give 'em all the aid an' comfort they wanted if I could only find 'em, I bet you. I wish we were livin' in the woods now like we used to. We'd stand enough sight better chance of meetin' 'em than we do here so nigh the hatchery."

"An' what's the reason we ain't livin' in the woods, quiet and peaceable?" exclaimed Sam. "It's all along of Joe Wayring an' the rest of them Mt. Airy fellers who burned us outen house an' home, so't we've got to stay around the settlements whether we want to or not."

The mention of Joe Wayring's name seemed to set Matt Coyle beside himself with rage. He jumped to his feet and strode back and forth in front of his log, flourishing his arms in the air and uttering threats that were enough to make even a canvas canoe tremble with apprehension. Why Matt should feel so spiteful against my master I could not understand. Joe had no hand in driving him out of Mount Airy, neither did he lend the least assistance in destroying Matt's property. The trustees and the guides were the responsible parties, but Matt did not give a thought to them. The innocent Joe was the object of his wrath, and he promised to visit all sorts of terrible punishments upon him at no very distant day.

"We'll tie him to a tree an' larrup him till he'll wish him an' his crowd had left us alone," said Matt, in savage tones. "We'll larn him that honest folks ain't to be drove about like sheep jest 'cause they ain't got no good clothes to w'ar. But six thousand dollars!" added Matt, coming back to the point from which he started. "That's a power of money, ain't it?"

"Six hundred you mean," suggested Sam.

"That's the reward that's been offered for them robbers."

"Who said any thing about the reward," exclaimed Matt, almost fiercely. "I wasn't thinkin' of the reward. I was thinkin' of the six thousand."

"Wouldn't you try to 'rest 'em, pap, if you should find 'em?" inquired Sam.

"Not if I could make more by givin' 'em aid an' comfort, I wouldn't. Say," added Matt, giving Sam a poke in the ribs with his finger. "Six hundred dollars is nothin' alongside of six thousand, is it? Them fellers will have to camp somewhere, if they stay in the woods, won't they? An' is there a man in the Injun Lake country that's better'n I be at findin' camps an' sneakin' up on 'em? Jakey, go into the shanty an' bring out that canvas canoe of your'n. Go easy, 'cause Rube wants to sleep after bein' up all night. More'n that, I want him to sleep; for I don't care to have him know what I am up to. I suspicion that he's watchin' me."

"Where be you goin', pap?" asked Jake, in some alarm.

"Up to Haskinses' to take a look around his landin'," replied Matt. "You didn't see any thing of them robbers while you was workin' about that suller, did you, Jakey?"

"Didn't see hide nor hair of nobody," was the answer. "If I'd seen 'em I'd been that scared that I never would quit a runnin'."

"Well, they was up there somewheres, 'cause Swan an' his crowd tracked 'em that fur. But they couldn't foller 'em no furder, an' that proves that the robbers must have crossed the lake right there."

"I don't reckon they did, pap," replied Jake, whose uneasiness and anxiety were so apparent that it was a wonder his father's suspicions were not aroused. "'Cause where did they get a boat to take 'em over? Haskins don't own but one, an' he's got that up to Injun Lake."

"I don't know nothin' about that," answered Matt, doggedly. "Them robbers got across the lake somehow, an' I am sure of it. Leastwise it won't do any harm to slip up there, easy like, an' look around a bit. Go an' bring out the canoe, Jakey."

I did not wonder at the white face the boy brought with him when he came into the cabin and took me out of the chimney corner, and neither was I much surprised to hear him mutter under his breath—

"I do wish in my soul that I'd busted a hole into you when I run you onto that snag last night. Then pap couldn't have used you this mornin'. I'll bet he don't never go out in you no more."

"Now, then," said Matt, "put him together, ready for business—you can do it better'n I can —while I go in after my pipe an' rifle."

"Say, Jakey," said Sam, in a delighted whisper, as Matt tip-toed into the cabin, "if pap finds the camp of them robbers won't we be rich folks, though? He ain't goin' in fur the reward, pap ain't. Looks to me as though he had got his eye on them six thousand."

That was the way it looked to Jake too; and although he knew that his father could not find the money, hidden as it was under five feet and more of muddy water, he was afraid that he would see something at Haskins'

landing that would make him open his eyes. And Jake's fears were realized. In less than an hour after he and his brother put me into the water at the head of the outlet, Matt had paddled up to Haskins' landing and was taking in all the signs he found there with the eye of an Indian trailer. Nothing escaped his scrutiny. He saw the impress of Jake's bare feet in the mud, the prints of boots, the marks of the canvas canoe on the beach, and noted the place where the bags had been left while the robbers were being ferried across the lake. Then he sat down on a log, smoked a pipe, and thought about it.

"What was that boy's notion for tellin' me that them robbers couldn't have crossed the lake 'cause they didn't have no boat, do you reckon?" said he, to himself. "Come to think of it, he did look kinder queer when I said I was goin' to look about Haskinses' landin' jest to see what I could find here, and I'll bet that that boy knows more about them robbers than any body else in these woods. He took 'em over, Jakey did—all the signs show that. Course he didn't do it for nothin',

so he must have money. Now what's to be done about it?"

This was a question upon which the squatter pondered long and deeply. If Jake had earned some money the night before, of course Matt ought to have the handling of it, for he was the head of the family; but how was he going to get it? He knew the boy too well to indulge in the hope that he would surrender it on demand, and as for whipping it out of him—well, that wouldn't be so easy, either; for Jake was light of foot, and quite as much at home in the woods as his father was. It wouldn't do for Matt to come to an open rupture with his hopeful son, for if he did who would steal the bacon and potatoes the next time the larder ran low? Sam was too timid to forage in the dark, running the risk of encounters with vicious dogs and settlers who might be on the watch, and even Matt had no heart for such work. He must bide his time and pick Jake's pocket after he had gone to bed, unless—here the squatter got upon his feet, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and shoved the canvas canoe out into the lake.

"Them robbers must have made pretty considerable of a trail, lumberin' through the bresh in the dark, an' what's to hender me from follerin' 'em?" he soliloquized, as he plied the double paddle. "Havin' been up all night they oughter sleep to-day, an' if I can only find their camp—eh?"

Matt Coyle began building air-castles as these thoughts passed through his mind. He paddled directly across the lake, avoiding the snag on which I had been overturned the night before, passing over Jake's silver mine, which he might have seen if he had looked into the water, and presently he was standing on the spot where the robbers made their landing when they waded ashore. Here another surprise awaited him. There were no signs to indicate that the canvas canoe had been there before, and neither were there any prints of bare feet to be seen. Boot-marks were plenty, however, and the ground about them was wet.

"Now what's the meanin' of this yer?" exclaimed Matt, who was greatly astonished and bewildered. "What's the reason Jakey didn't land his passengers on shore 'stead of

dumpin' them in the water? Do you reckon he tipped 'em over an' spilled that money out into the lake? If he did, 'taint no use for me to foller the trail any furder."

Little dreaming how shrewd a guess he had made, Matt filled his pipe and sat down for another smoke. While he was trying to find some satisfactory answers to the questions he had propounded to himself, he was aroused by a slight splashing in the water, and looked up to see a light canoe close upon him. It had rounded the point unseen, and was now so near that any attempt at flight or concealment would have been useless. So Matt put on a bold face. He arose to his feet with great deliberation, picked up his rifle, and rested it in the hollow of his arm.

"No one man in the Injun Lake country can 'rest me," I heard him say, in determined tones, "an' if that feller knows when he's well off he won't try it. Well, I do think in my soul! If that ain't the boy that told me to steal Joe Wayring's boat, I'm a sinner. He's the very chap I want to see, for I've got use for him. Hello, there!" he added, aloud.

"Powerful glad to see you agin, so onexpected like. Come ashore."

Tom Bigden (for it was he) paused when he heard himself addressed so familiarly, and sat in his canoe with his double paddle suspended in the air. He gave a quick glance at the tattered, unkempt figure on the beach, and with an exclamation of disgust went on his way again.

"Say," shouted Matt, in peremptory tones. "Hold on a minute. I want to talk to you."

"Well, I don't want to talk to you," was Tom's reply. "Mind your own business and let your betters alone."

If Tom had tried for a week he could not have said any thing that was better calculated to make Matt Coyle angry. The latter never acknowledged that there was any body in the world better than himself. Lazy, shiftless vagabond and thief that he was, he considered himself the equal of any industrious, saving and honest guide in the country.

"Who's my betters?" Matt almost yelled. "Not you, I'd have you know. I can have you 'rested before this time to-morrer, if I

feel like it, an' I will, too, if you throw on any more of your 'ristocratic airs with me. Mind that, while you're talkin' about bein' 'my betters.'"

"Why, you—you villain," exclaimed Tom, who could not find words strong enough to express his surprise and indignation. "How dare you talk to me in that way?"

"No more villain than yourself," retorted Matt, hotly, "an' I dare talk to you in any way I please. You don't like it 'cause a man who ain't got no good clothes to wear has the upper hand of you an' can send you to jail any day he feels in the humor for it, do you? Well, that's the way the thing stands, an' if you want to keep friends with me, you had better do as I tell you."

Tom Bigden was utterly confounded. Never in his life before had he been so shamefully insulted. Do as that blear-eyed ragamuffin told him! He would cut off his right hand first. Almost ready to boil over with rage, Tom dipped his paddle into the water and set his canoe in motion again.

"Well, go on if you want to," yelled

Matt. "But bear one thing in mind: I'll leave word at the hatchery this very night, an' to-morrer there'll be a constable lookin' for you. You forget that you told me to steal Joe Wayring's boat down there to Sherwin's Pond last summer, don't you? You knowed I was goin' to take it, you never said or done a thing to hender me, an' that makes you a 'cessory before the fact," added Matt glibly, and with a ring of triumph in his voice. "Now, will you stop an' talk to me, or go to jail?"

Tom was frightened as well as astonished. He *had* forgotten all about that little episode at Sherwin's Pond, but the squatter's threatening words recalled it very vividly to mind. He knew enough about law to be aware that an accessory before the fact is one who advises or commands another to commit a felony, and Tom had done just that very thing, and thereby rendered himself liable to punishment. It is true that there were no witnesses present when he urged Matt to steal the canvas canoe, but there were plenty of them around when he advised him to steal

the hunting dogs belonging to the guests of the hotels, and to turn the sail-boats in Mirror Lake adrift so that they would go through the rapids into Sherwin's Pond.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Tom, as these reflections came thronging upon him thick and fast. "What have I done? I have put my foot in it, and this low fellow has the upper hand of me as sure as the world."

I am of opinion that Tom would have given something just then if he had not been in such haste to take vengeance upon a boy who never did the first thing to incur his enmity.

CHAPTER VI.

JAKE WORKS HIS MINE.

"I ALLOWED you'd stop after you took time to think the matter over," chuckled Matt, when he saw the boy lift his paddle from the water and rest it across his knee. "I ain't forgot that you spoke kind words to me an' my family down there to Mount Airy when every body else was jawin' at us an' tryin' to kick us outen house an' home, an' I'd be glad to be friends with you," he added, in a more conciliatory tone. "But I ain't goin' to stand no airs of no sort. Now, come ashore so't I can talk to you."

"What do you want to say to me?" asked Tom, who could hardly refrain from yelling in the ecstasy of his rage. The man talked as though he had a perfect right to command him. "Speak out, if you have any thing on your

mind. I can hear it from my canoe as well as I could ashore."

"Well, I shan't speak out, nuther," answered Matt, decidedly. "I ain't goin' to talk so't they can hear me clear up to Injun Lake. Come ashore."

Tom reluctantly obeyed; that is, he ran the bow of his canoe upon the beach, but that was as far as he would go.

"I am as near shore as I am going to get," said he, with a little show of spirit. "Now what have you to say to me? Be in a hurry, for my friends are waiting for me."

"Well, you needn't get huffy about it," replied Matt, backing toward his log and pulling his pipe from his pocket. "I can tell you in a few words what I want you to do for me, an' as for your friends, they can wait till their hurry's over. Say," added the squatter, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, "you know I told you when I stole this here canvas canoe that I was comin' to Injun Lake to go into the business of independent guidin'. You remember that, don't you?"

"Well, what of it?" was the only response

Tom deigned to make. "No matter what I remember. Go on with what you have to say to me."

"Don't get in a persp'ration." continued Matt, with the most exasperating deliberation. "Yes ; that's one thing that made me take the canvas canoe—so't I could go into the business of guidin' on my own hook : but when I got here I found that the landlords wouldn't have nuthin' to do with me, an' the guests wouldn't, nuther. So I took to visitin' all the camps I could hear of, an' helpin' myself to what I could find in 'em in the way of grub, we'pons an' sich. I told you that was what I was goin' to do. You remember it, don't you?"

Tom made a gesture of impatience but said nothing.

"Yes ; that's what I done, an' it wasn't long before I kicked up the biggest kind of a row up there to Injun Lake," said the squatter, pounding his knees with his clenched hands and shaking all over with suppressed merriment. "The women-folks dassent go into the woods for fear that they would run foul of me

when they wasn't lookin' for it, an' some of the guests told Hanson—he's the new landlord, you know—that if he didn't have me took up an' put in jail they'd never come nigh him agin. Oh, I tell you I've done a heap since me an' you had that little talk up there to Sherwin's Pond, an' I'm goin' to do a heap more before the season's over. I said I'd bust up guidin' an' the hotels along with it, an' I'm goin' to keep my word. I'll l'arn them 'ristocrats that I'm jest as good as they ever dare be, even if I ain't got no good clothes to wear."

Tom Bigden was intensely disgusted. Matt talked to him as unreservedly as he might have talked to an accomplice. When he paused to light his pipe Tom managed to say—

"You hinted last summer that you intended to kidnap little children if you got a good chance. Have you tried it?"

"Not yet I ain't, but there's no tellin' what I may do if they don't quit crowdin' on me," replied Matt, with a grin. "That is one of the tricks I still hold in my hand. I must have money to buy grub an' things, an' since I ain't

allowed to earn it honest, as I would like to do, I must get it any way I can. An' this brings me to what I want to say to you."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Tom. "Now I hope you will hurry up. I am getting tired of listening to your senseless gabble. I am in no way interested in what you have done or what you intend to do. What do you want of me? That's all I care to know."

"Don't get in a persp'ration," said the squatter again. "Yes; I visited all the camps I could hear of, like I told you, an' among other things I took outen them camps were two scatter-guns an' a rifle. One of the scatter-guns I give up agin, an' I got ten dollars for doin' it, too."

"Well, what do I care about that?" said Tom, when Matt paused and looked at him. "I tell you I am not interested in these things. Come to the point at once."

"I'm comin' to it," answered the squatter. "I give up one of the scatter-guns, like I told you, but t'other one an' the rifle I've got yet. There's been a reward of a hundred dollars

offered for them two guns—fifty dollars apiece —an' I want it."

"Then why don't you give up the guns and claim it?"

"Now, jest listen at the fule!" exclaimed Matt. "I dassent, 'cause there's been a reward of a hundred more dollars offered for the man that stole them guns. That's me. I can't go up to Injun Lake to take them guns back to the men that owns 'em, an' I'm afeared to send the boys, 'cause they would be took up the same as I would. See?"

"Yes, I see; but I don't know what you are going to do about it. You've got the guns, and if you are afraid to give them up you will have to keep them. I don't see any other way for you to do."

"I do," said Matt; and there was something in the tone of his voice that made Tom uneasy. "I don't want the guns, 'cause I can't use 'em; but I do want the money, an' that's what I am goin' to talk to you about. I want you to buy them guns—"

"Well, I shan't do it," exclaimed Tom, who was fairly staggered by this proposition.

"I've got one gun, and that's all I need. Besides, I am not going to become a receiver of stolen property."

"I'll give 'em to you for twenty-five dollars apiece," continued Matt, paying no heed to the interruption, "an' you can take 'em up to Injun Lake an' claim the whole of the reward. You'll make fifty dollars by it."

"I tell you I won't do it," repeated Tom. "I'll not have any thing to do with it. I'm not going to get myself into trouble for the sake of putting money into your pocket."

"There ain't no need of your gettin' yourself into trouble less'n you want to. When you take the guns up to Hanson you can tell him that you found 'em in the bresh—that you didn't know who they belonged to, an' so you made up your decision that you had better take 'em to him. See? That'll be all fair an' squar', an' nobody will ever suspicion that I give 'em to you. Come to think on it, I won't give 'em to you," added Matt. "You hand me the twenty-five dollars apiece, an' I will tell you right where the guns is hid, an' you can go up there an' get 'em. Then when you

tell Hanson that you found 'em in the bresh you will tell him nothing but the truth. What do you say?"

"I say I haven't got fifty dollars to spend in any such way," answered Tom. He wished from the bottom of his heart that he had pluck enough to defy the squatter, but he hadn't. It cut him to the quick to be obliged to sit there and hear himself addressed so familiarly by such a fellow as Matt Coyle, but he could not see any way of escape. The man had it in his power to make serious trouble for him.

"Ain't you got that much money about your good clothes?" asked Matt, incredulously.

"I haven't fifty cents to my name."

"You can't make me b'lieve that. You wouldn't come to Injun Lake without no money to pay your expenses. Don't stand to reason, that don't."

"My cousin Ralph carries the purse and foots all our bills; but he hasn't half that amount left. We are pretty near strapped and almost ready to go home."

"Well, I won't be hard on you," said Matt. "I am the accommodatin'est feller you ever see. Go home, ask your pap for the money, an' come back an' hand it to me. That's fair, ain't it? Mount Airy is a hundred miles from Injun Lake. You oughter go an' come back in ten days. I'll give you that long. What do you say?"

"I'll think about it," replied Tom, whose sole object just then was to get out of hearing of Matt Coyle's voice. As he spoke he placed one blade of his paddle against the bottom and shoved his canoe out into deep water.

"That won't do, that won't," exclaimed Matt. "I want to know whether or not you are goin' to bring me that money."

"That depends upon whether I can get it or not."

"'Cause you needn't think you can get away from me by jest goin' up to Mount Airy," continued Matt. "There's constables up there same's there is at Injun Lake, an' a word dropped at the hatchery will reach 'em mighty easy. If you want me to be friends

with you, you won't sleep sound till you bring me that fifty dollars."

"I wonder if any other living boy ever submitted so tamely to such an insult," soliloquized Tom, as he headed his canoe up the lake and paddled back toward the point. "That villain holds me completely in his power. He can disgrace me before the whole village of Mount Airy any time he sees fit to do so. The minute he is arrested and brought to trial, just that minute I am done for. If I give him fifty dollars for those guns, how much better off will I be? He will have a still firmer hold upon me. He'll rob other camps, compel me to buy his plunder by threats of exposure, and the first thing I know I shall be a professional 'fence'—receiver of stolen goods. By gracious!" exclaimed Tom, redoubling his efforts at the paddle as if he hoped to run away from the gloomy thoughts that pressed so thickly upon him. "What am I coming to? What *have* I come to?"

"There, now," I heard Matt mutter, as he stood with his hands on his hips, watching Tom Bigden's receding figure. "I've done

two good strokes of business this morning. I've brought that feller down a peg or two, an' I have pervided for gettin' shet of them guns in a way I didn't look for. I thought for one spell that they wasn't goin' to be of no use to me, but now I shall make fifty dollars clean cash outen 'em. He'll bring it to me, for if he don't I'll tell on him sure, an' then he'll be in a pretty fix with all them people up there to Mount Airy knowin' to his meanness. It hurts these 'ristocrats to have a feller like me to talk to 'em as I talked to that Bigden boy; I can see that plain enough. Well, they ain't got no business to have so much money an' so many fine things, while me an' my family is so poor that we don't know where our next pair of shoes is comin' from."

Highly pleased with the result of his interview with Tom Bigden, Matt shoved the canvas canoe into the water and pulled slowly toward the outlet, once more passing directly over Jake's silver mine. Perhaps the sunken treasure had some occult influence upon him, for he straightway dismissed Tom from his

mind, and thought about Jake and the robbers and the six thousand dollars.

"Don't stand to reason that Jakey would a told me that he hadn't seen them robbers less'n he had some excuse for it," said Matt, to himself. "He did see 'em, an' I know it. He took 'em across the lake, too. He didn't do it for nothing, so he's got money. I'll speak to him about it when I get home, an' then I'll make it my business to keep an eye on him."

Having come to this determination Matt dismissed Jake as well as Tom from his thoughts, and made all haste to reach the outlet, not forgetting as he paddled swiftly along to keep a close watch of the woods on shore. Mr. Swan and a large squad of guides and constables were in there somewhere, and Matt Coyle had a wholesome fear of them. When I ran upon the beach at the head of the outlet, I was not very much surprised to see Jake step out of the bushes and come forward to meet his father. The boy must have been in great suspense all the morning, and although he was almost bursting with impatience to

know whether or not his father had discovered any thing during his absence he could not muster up courage enough to ask any questions. But Matt began the conversation himself.

"Jakey," said he, reproachfully. "I didn't think you would get so low down in the world as to go an' fool your pap the way you done this mornin'. You told me you hadn't seen hide nor hair of them robbers, an' that wasn't so. You did see 'em, an' you took 'em across the lake, too. But you didn't land 'em on this side; you dumped 'em out into the water. Now how much did you get for it?"

Jake was not so much taken aback as I thought he would be. He had been expecting something of this kind and was prepared for it. He knew that his father was an adept at reading "sign," and he was as well satisfied as he wanted to be that his five dollars ferry money would never do him any good. The question was: How much more had his father learned? Did he know any thing about the silver mine? Jake didn't believe he did, else he would have been more jubilant. A man

who knew where he could put his hand on six thousand dollars at any moment would not look as sober as Matt Coyle did.

"I didn't get nothin' for dumpin' on 'em out, pap," replied Jake, after a little pause. "That was somethin' I couldn't help. The night was dark, an' I didn't see the snag till I was clost onto it."

"Well, what become of the six thousand dollars they had with 'em?" inquired Matt, looking sharply at the boy, who met his gaze without flinching. "Did you see any thing of it?"

"I seen a couple of grip-sacks into their hands, but I didn't ask 'em what was in 'em," answered Jake. He looked very innocent and truthful when he said it, but his father was not deceived. He had known Jake to tell lies before.

"What become of the grip-sacks when you run onto the snag an' spilled 'em out?" asked Matt.

"They hung fast to 'em an' took 'em ashore an' into the woods where I didn't see 'em no more."

"How much did you get for takin' the robbers over the lake?"

"Jest five dollars; an' there it is," said Jake, who knew that the money would have to be produced sooner or later.

"Now jest look at the fule!" shouted Matt, going off into a sudden paroxysm of rage. "Five dollars, an' them with six thousand stolen dollars into their grip-sacks! Jake, I've the best notion in the world to cut me a hickory an' wear it out over your back."

Jake began to look wild. When his father talked that way things were getting serious.

"Hold on a minute, pap," he protested, as Matt pulled his knife from his pocket and started toward the bushes. "How was I goin' to know that they had all that money an' that it was stole from the bank? If I had knowed it, I would a taxed 'em a hundred dollars, sure; but I thought they had clothes an' things in them grip-sacks."

Matt paused, reflected a moment, and then shut up his knife and put it into his pocket.

"Why didn't you tell me that you had made five dollars by takin' 'em over 'stead of sayin'

that you hadn't never seed 'em?" he demanded.

"'Cause I wanted to keep the money to get me some shoes," answered Jake, telling the truth this time. "Winter's comin' on, an' I don't want to go around with my feet in the snow, like I done last year. I'll give you half, pap, an' then you can get some shoes for yourself."

To Jake's great amazement his father replied—

"No, sonny, you keep it. You earned it, fair and squar', an' I won't take it from you. I shall make fifty dollars hard cash outen them guns we've got hid in the bresh, an' that will be enough to run me for a little while. Now take your boat to pieces an' bring him up to the house."

So saying, Matt Coyle walked off, leaving Jake lost in wonder.

"Well, this beats me," said the boy, after he had taken a minute or two to collect his wits. "Pap wouldn't take half my five dollars, an' he's found a way to make fifty dollars outen them guns! I don't b'lieve it," added Jake, his face growing white with ex-

citement and alarm. "He's found my silver mind ; that's what's the matter of him."

The contortions Jake went through when this unwelcome conviction forced itself upon him were wonderful. He strode along the beach, pulling his hair one minute and clapping his hands and jumping up and down in his tracks the next, and acting altogether as if he had taken leave of his senses. I had never before witnessed such a performance, having always been accustomed to the companionship of those who were able to control themselves, under any and all circumstances. After a little while he ceased his demonstrations, and picking me up bodily, carried me into the bushes and left me there.

"I won't take him to pieces, nuther," said Jake, aloud. "I'll leave him here so't I can get him without pap's bein' knowin' to it, an' when night comes I'll go up an' see after my silver mind. If pap has found it, he'll have to give me half of it, cash in hand, or I'll tell on him."

Although Jake really believed that his "claim" had been "jumped," he did not

neglect to make preparations for working it in case he found his fears were groundless. He came back to me about the middle of the afternoon, and as he approached I saw him take a long, stout line out of his pocket. What he intended to do with it I could not tell; but I found out an hour or two afterward, for then I had a second visitor in the person of Matt Coyle, who came stealing through the bushes without causing a leaf to rustle. He stopped beside me and picked up the line.

"He didn't take the canoe to pieces an' carry him up to the house, like I told him to, an' he's stole his mam's clothes-line and brung it down here," said Matt to himself. "Now, what did he do that for? He's goin' to use 'em both to-night, Jakey is, an' what's he goin' to do with 'em? He's a mighty smart boy, but he'll find that he can't fool his pap."

The hours passed slowly away, and finally the woods were shrouded in almost impenetrable darkness. The time for action was drawing near. I waited for it impatiently, because I was sure that the temporary ownership of those six thousand dollars would be

decided before morning, and I felt some curiosity to know who was going to get them. While I was thinking about it, Jake Coyle glided up and laid hold of me. In two minutes more I was in the water and making good time up the lake towards the sunken silver mine; but before I had left the woods at the head of the outlet very far behind I became aware that we were followed. I distinctly saw a light Indian Lake skiff put out from the shadow of the trees and follow silently in our wake. The boat was one of the two that had been stolen by Matt and his family on the day that Mr. Swan and his party burned their camp; and, although the night was dark, I was as certain as I could be that its solitary occupant was Matt Coyle himself. He held close in to the trees on the left hand side of the lake, and as often as Jake stopped and looked back the pursuer stopped also; and, as he took care to keep in the shadow, of course he could not be seen.

"Pap thinks he's smart," muttered Jake, after he had made a long halt and looked up and down the lake to satisfy himself that there

was no one observing his movements, "an' p'raps he is, but not smart enough to get away with the whole of them six thousand. If I don't find them grip-sacks, I shall know sure enough that he's been here before me; an' if he don't hand over half of it the minute I get home I'll tell on him afore sun-up. Here I am, an' it wont take me long to see how the thing stands."

As Jake said this, he drew up alongside the snag and dropped the anchor overboard. He must have been in a fearful state of suspense, for I could feel that he was trembling in every limb. When he came to divest himself of his clothes, preparatory to going down after the money, his hands shook so violently that he could scarcely find the few buttons that held them together. He didn't dive, for the splash could have been heard a long distance in the stillness of the night, and might have attracted somebody's attention. He made one end of the clothes-line fast to a brace, took the other in his hand, and, lowering himself gently over the stern of the canoe, drew in a long breath and sank out of sight. He was gone a full minute;

but before he came to the surface I knew he had been successful in his search, for I could tell by the way the line sawed back and forth over the gunwale that he was tying it to something. An instant later his head bobbed up close alongside, and then Jake essayed the somewhat difficult task of clambering back into the canoe. Being a remarkably active young fellow, he accomplished it with much more ease than I expected; and no sooner had he gained his feet than he began hauling in on the line with almost frantic haste.

"I've got one of 'em! I've got one of 'em!" he kept on saying over and over again; and a second afterward one of the little valises was whipped out of the water and deposited on the bottom of the canoe. "Pap didn't find my silver mind, like I was afeard of, an' it's mine, all mine. I'm rich."

Forgetting where he was in the excess of his glee, Jake jumped up and knocked his heels together; but when he came down I wasn't there to meet him. He gave me a shove that sent me to one side, and Jake disappeared in the water. He was greatly alarmed by the

noise he made, and during the next five minutes remained perfectly motionless. Supporting himself by holding fast to the anchor rope, he waited and listened. He was so quiet that he scarcely seemed to breathe; and all this while an equally motionless and silent figure sat in the skiff, not more than fifty yards away, taking note of every thing that happened in the vicinity of the snag.

The deep silence that brooded over the lake deceived Jake, and he made ready to go down after the rest of the money. He was not out of sight more than half a minute, and again the sawing of the line told me that he had found the object of his search. There was another short, frantic struggle to get into the canoe, a hasty pull at the rope, and the second valise was jerked out of the water and placed safely beside its companion. Jake Coyle had worked his silver mine to some purpose.

CHAPTER VII.

AMONG FRIENDS AGAIN.

I CANNOT give you even a faint idea of the extravagant demonstrations of delight to which Jake Coyle gave way when he saw the two valises deposited side by side on the bottom of the canoe. He had been tormented by the fear that his father had found and appropriated the money, and he could not convince himself that those fears were groundless, until he had opened both the valises and plunged his hands among the glittering silver pieces with which they were filled almost to the top. Then he threw himself back in the stern of the canoe and panted as if he were utterly exhausted with his exertions.

"I do think in my soul that I've got it," said he, in an excited whisper. "Now what'll I do with it to keep it safe? If pap or that Sam of our'n——"

For some reason or other Jake became

frightened when he thought of his father and brother. The idea of sharing his ill-gotten gains with them never once entered his head. He scrambled to his feet and hastily pulled on his clothes, after which he raised the anchor and paddled up the lake. As soon as I got under way the pursuing skiff was set in motion also; but I lost sight of it after we rounded the first point and entered the mouth of the creek which had been the scene of Joe Wayring's exciting encounter with Matt Coyle and his boys a few weeks before.

Up this creek Jake paddled as swiftly as he could, his object being to find a hiding-place for the money so remote from the hatchery that no one who lived about there would be likely to stumble upon it. For two hours he never slackened his pace, and by that time I became aware that we were drawing near to the site of Matt's old camp—the one that had been destroyed by Mr. Swan and his party. A few minutes later I passed through the little water-way that connected the creek with the cove, and there Jake made a landing and got out.

"I've heared them say that lightning don't strike two times in the same place," said he, as he drew me higher upon the beach and took hold of the valises, "an' that's what made me come up here. Swan has been here once an' done all the damage he could, an' 'tain't no ways likely that he'll come agin. Pap dassent come so fur from home, 'cause he's that scared of the constables that he sticks clost to the shanty all the time, an' don't even go huntin' for squirrels; so I reckon the woods about here are the best place I can find to hide my money. I'll leave my canoe, too, an' then, when I get ready to strike out for myself, I'll have him an' the money an' both them fine guns right where I can lay my hands onto 'em."

So saying Jake disappeared in the bushes, taking the valises with him. He was gone half an hour, and when he returned he proceeded to fold me up and tie me together with a piece of rope. This done he found a hiding-place for me under a pile of brush about twenty feet from the spot where the lean-to stood before it was burned, and, after covering me up as well as he could in the

dark, glided away with noiseless footsteps. It was a long time before I saw him again, but he had not been gone more than five minutes when I heard a slight rustling among the leaves and a snapping of twigs as if some one was walking cautiously over them. Then I knew I was not alone in the woods. Who my invisible companion was I could not tell for certain, but I believed it was the occupant of the skiff that had followed us from the outlet. He revealed his identity when he came near my place of concealment, for I recognized his voice. It was Matt Coyle. He had kept Jake in sight until he saw him paddle into the creek, and then he landed and took to the woods. Something told him where the boy was going with the money he had fished out of the lake, and by going afoot and taking a short cut he gained on Jake so much that he arrived in the vicinity of his old camp at least ten minutes ahead of him. But he could not see where the valises had been hidden—the woods were too dark for that—and now he was trying his best to find them, as I learned from his soliloquy.

"He's a pretty smart boy, Jakey is, but not smart enough to fool his pap," I heard him say. "The ondutiful scamp! I had oughter wear a hickory out on him the minute I get home; but here's the diffikilty; if I do that he'll tell Rube where them fine guns is hid, an' the minute they are give up to their owners then Rube 'll turn squar' around an' have me took up for the sake of gettin' the reward. See? If I can find the money all unbeknownst to Jakey, an' take it off an' hide it somewhere else, so't I can find it every time I want to use a dollar or two, then Jakey 'll think that the constables have stumbled on it, an' he won't never say a word; but if I try to force him to give it up there'll be a furse, sure. He's like his pap, Jakey is. It won't do to crowd him too fur. Mebbe it's in yer."

Matt bent over my hiding-place and thrust his hand into the pile of brush. He felt all over and around me, and uttered many an exclamation of anger and disgust when he found that the valises were not there with me. He spent the whole of the night in tramping about the woods in my neighbor-

hood, and how he missed the objects of his search I don't know to this day. He rested a little while before daylight—at least I thought he did, for the sound of his footsteps ceased for an hour or two—but as soon as he could see where he was going he was up and at it again; but this time he was interrupted. Deeply interested as he was in his search, he did not neglect to keep his eyes and ears open, and consequently he did not fail to hear the threatening sounds that came to him on the morning breeze. I heard them a few minutes afterward, and would have shouted with delight if I had possessed the power. Mr. Swan and his party were approaching. Although I could not see them I was certain of it, for I had been in the guide's company so often that I could have recognized his voice among a thousand. Presently they came close to my hiding-place and I heard one of the party say—

"Here's where Matt's lean-to stood. We came pretty near catching the sly old coon that day, but he must have had some member of his family on the watch. We found the fire burn-

ing and the dinner under way, but Matt was nowhere to be seen."

"They have been back here since then, and within a few hours, too," said Mr. Swan. "See how the leaves are kicked up. Let's look around, boys, and perhaps we shall find something."

I was delighted to hear this order. The "boys" began to look about at once, and one of them followed Matt's trail straight to my place of concealment. The constable who accompanied him kicked the pile of brush to pieces, caught hold of the rope with which I was bound, and dragged me into view. The first words he spoke seemed to indicate that he had never seen any thing like me before.

"What in the name of common sense is this?" said he.

"That?" replied Mr. Swan, who stood close by. "Oh, that is Joe Wayring's canvas canoe —an old thing that saw his best days years ago. But Joe thinks a heap of him and will be mighty glad to get him again. I haven't got any thing to do just now, and so I will

make it my business to take the canoe up to him. Joe is a good fellow, and I shall be glad to do that much for him."

Thank goodness, I was in a fair way to see Joe Wayring once more! I was as happy as I wanted to be after that. I hoped Mr. Swan would take me home at once, for I was impatient to see Fly-rod and the long bows and the toboggan and all the rest of my friends in Mount Airy. I looked around at the members of the squad and saw many familiar faces among them. In fact, I had seen them all at one time or another, with the exception—could I believe my eyes? I looked again, and told myself that there could be no mistake about it. There were two strangers among them, and they were dressed in slouch hats and long dark coats. They were neither hand-cuffed nor bound, but they were closely watched by two armed officers who took no part in beating the bushes. They were the bank robbers—the very men I had tumbled out into the lake. If I had had the slightest doubt of their identity it would have been dispelled when the deputy sheriff said—

"Now, boys, we've got some evidence. Who can stretch this canvas canoe?"

Mr. Swan replied that he could, and he did. Under his skillful hands I quickly assumed my usual symmetrical proportions; but before he was through with me one of the robbers called out—

"That's the boat. That's the very boat that we started to cross the lake in."

"How do you know?" asked the sheriff.

"Because, as we told you, we examined him with the aid of a lighted match before we would trust ourselves to him," replied one of the prisoners. "I believe that boy tipped us over on purpose."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," assented the sheriff. "You let him see the inside of one of the valises, and of course the sight of so much money excited his cupidity."

"I hope Jim didn't hit him when he shot at him," said the other robber, in an anxious tone.

"Haven't I told you more than a dozen times that you need not borrow trouble on that score?" asked the officer. "If the boy had

been hurt we should probably have heard of it when we crossed the outlet at the hatchery the next morning. Robbing the bank is all you will have to answer for."

And wasn't that enough? I wondered. I did not know just what the penalty was for the offense of which they were guilty, but I did know that they were destined to pass some of the best years of their lives in prison. I was surprised to hear the sheriff talk so familiarly with the robbers, but really there was nothing surprising in it. Having captured them, as he was in duty bound to do, he showed them as much consideration as he showed the guides he had summoned to his assistance, but he kept a sharp eye on them to see that they did not escape.

"Put him together again, Swan, and we will go on and pay our respects to Jake Coyle," continued the officer. "It is possible that he intends to return the money and claim the reward. If he does—"

"Don't fool yourself," said Mr. Swan, with a laugh. "If Jake ran into that snag on purpose, he did it with the intention of fishing up

that money and keeping it. He can't claim the reward, for there is a warrant out for him. He helped to steal this canvas canoe."

Having tied me together with the rope, Mr. Swan raised me to his shoulder, ordered the guides to stop talking, and the entire posse set off through the woods in the direction of the hatchery. As they drew near to it they spread out right and left, forming a sort of skirmish line which was so long that those on the flanks were out of sight of one another, and in this order moved forward with increased caution. The sheriff and Mr. Swan remained in the center with the two prisoners, the latter holding me in one hand and a revolver in the other. The officer consulted his watch very frequently, and at the end of ten minutes moved out of the bushes to the "carry," followed by Mr. Swan and the captives. Then I understood the meaning of this maneuver. The sheriff's object was to surround Rube's cabin and capture the inmates.

As soon as he reached the "carry" the sheriff gave a shrill whistle and ran forward at the top of his speed, leaving the guide to fol-

low with the prisoners. When we came within sight of the cabin a few minutes later I saw the entire posse gathered around it, and the sheriff and Rube standing in the doorway, the latter rubbing his eyes as if he had just been aroused from a sound sleep.

"Sold again," said the officer, as Mr. Swan came up.

"There, now!" exclaimed the guide, who was profoundly astonished. "Well, I told you that Matt was a sly old fox, and that you'd have to be mighty sly yourself if you caught him. The young ones are chips of the old block, and can dodge about in the woods like so many partridges. How did he find out that we were coming, do you reckon?"

"That's a mystery," answered the sheriff.

I could have told him that it was no mystery to me. The officer and his posse had made a good deal of noise in coming through the woods, and of course Matt Coyle heard them long before they came in sight. Knowing that they would have to go to the hatchery in order to procure boats to cross the outlet, he took to his heels in short order, made the best of his

way to the cabin, and started his family off into the woods. That was all there was of it, but it proved the truth of the remark Mr. Swan once made in Joe Wayring's hearing—that Matt Coyle always had luck on his side. The fugitives did not awaken Rube, for they knew that he had nothing to fear from the officers of the law. I had often wondered what sort of a game the watchman was up to (I was as sure that he was playing a part as Matt was), and now I was given some insight into it.

"You would 'a' ruined Hanson if you'd arrested Matt Coyle," said Rube, when the guide ceased speaking. "If you take him up afore them guns is found he'll lose a dozen good customers next season, Hanson will, 'cause they say they'll never come back to his hotel till their property is given up to 'em. You don't want to be in too big a hurry. Both the boys has offered to give me the guns for half the reward, an' as soon as they tell me where they are hid I'll bring 'em up to the lake. Then you can 'rest Matt, as soon as you please."

"I wasn't after Matt, although I should

have taken him in if I had found him here," answered the sheriff. "I was looking for Jake."

"What's he been a doin' of?"

"We think he knows something about the money that was stolen from the Irvington bank."

"I know he does," said Rube, earnestly. "I thought so yesterday morning, when I was readin' about it in the paper that Swan give me, an' I thought so last night when I stood at the head of the outlet an' saw him go up the lake in the canvas canoe. Say," he added, in a lower tone, "is them two fellers the robbers?"

The officer nodded.

"An' do you reckon Jake knows where they hid the money?"

"We don't think they hid it. Jake capsized them, and turned the money out into the lake."

"Well, I'll bet you it ain't there now," said Rube. "Jake got it up last night, less'n Matt stopped him."

"Was Matt with him?"

"He follered him in one of the boats that he stole from you fellers up the creek on the day you burned his camp."

"Where are those boats now?" inquired Mr. Swan.

"Up to the head of the outlet, hid in the bresh. I can show 'em to you any time."

"Come on and do it then," said the Sheriff. "There's no use wasting time here. It won't take us long to row up to that snag and see if the money is there. Four of us are enough. We will take one of the prisoners with us to show us right where the snag is, and the other can stay here."

Having designated by name the guides whom he wished to accompany him, the sheriff followed Rube through the woods toward the place where the skiffs were concealed, Mr. Swan bringing up the rear with me on his shoulder. The skiffs were quickly hauled out of their hiding-places and launched, and at the end of an hour we were all anchored alongside the snag, and two of the guides were searching the bottom of the lake for the valises, which I knew to be all of ten miles from there

in a straight line, and twenty by water. At last the guides came up and reported that there was no use of looking any longer. The grip-sacks were not there.

"Are you sure that this is the snag on which that boy capsized you?" inquired the sheriff.

"As sure as I can be," replied the prisoner, to whom the question was addressed. "It was the first one he came to, and it was directly opposite the house whose cellar he robbed. Are you going to give up looking?" he added, as the guides climbed back into their skiff. "I hate to think that that villain will remain at liberty to enjoy that six thousand, after all the risk Tony and I ran to get it."

"He'll not remain at liberty very long," answered the sheriff, with some asperity. "I'd have you know that I understand my business. I pledge you my word that you will see him in New London jail in less than a week after you get there."

This assurance seemed to satisfy the robber that justice would be done, and he had no more to say.

In obedience to the sheriff's order the guides

pulled back to the outlet and landed in front of the hatchery. The rest of the posse were ferried over to the opposite side and set out on foot for Indian Lake, all except the other prisoner, who was taken into the canvas canoe with Mr. Swan.

When we reached the lake I learned that there had been a regular exodus from the woods during the last two days. As soon as the women and children who were in camp heard that there were a couple of bank robbers hiding somewhere in the wilderness, they made all haste to get back to the hotels, where they knew they would be safe. Both the landlords were in a state of mind that can hardly be described. The season was not half over, and yet some of their guests were leaving every day, bound for other places of resort where thieves were not quite so plenty. Matt Coyle would have hugged himself with delight if he could have heard what I did. I arrived at the lake about nine o'clock in the morning, and at nine o'clock that night Mr. Swan and I were well on our way toward Mount Airy, which we reached without any mishap. We found Joe

and his two chums, Roy and Arthur, enjoying a sail on the lake in the Young Republic.

"I kinder thought you would like to have your canoe back again, and so I brought him up," said Mr. Swan, when he had shaken hands with the boys. "No, I won't take nothing for it, and I can't go up to your house and stay over night, neither. I've got to get back as soon as I can, for there's plenty of work to be done at Indian Lake. The Irvington bank robbers have been captured, but Matt Coyle and his boys are still at large, and they'll ruinate our business and the hotels' business, too, if we don't tend to 'em right along."

While the guide was telling the boys how the robbers had been hunted down and captured, he took hold of the rope with which I was tied and lifted me out of his skiff into the sail-boat, and then he said good-by and pulled away, while the Young Republic came about and scudded back toward Mr. Wayring's wharf.

Fly-rod told you, at the conclusion of his narrative, that when Joe Wayring returned from his trip to Indian Lake he expected to

meet his uncle, who was to take him and his chums on an extended canoe trip to some distant part of the country, "either east or west, they didn't know which;" but in this he was disappointed. Uncle Joe had been called away on important business, and the probabilities were that if they took their proposed trip at all it would not be until near the end of the vacation, and then it would be a very short one. So, for want of something better to do, Joe Wayring proposed an immediate return to Indian Lake.

"The time is our own until the first Monday in September," said he, "and what's the use of staying around the village and doing nothing? We know we can enjoy ourselves at the lake, but this time we'll give Matt Coyle and his boys a wide berth. We'll leave the regular routes of travel, and visit the famous spring-hole that Mr. Swan has so often described to us."

Arthur and Roy readily agreed to the proposition, and on the day I was restored to my lawful master the arrangements for the return trip had all been completed. They were only

waiting for Fly-rod, whose broken joint was being repaired by a skilled mechanic. He came the day after I got home, and you may be sure I was glad to see him once more. We passed the night in relating our adventures and exploits, and daylight the next morning found us on the wharf, waiting for Arthur Hastings to bring up the skiff.

The trip down the river, through the pond where the "battle in the dark" took place, and thence to Indian Lake, was made without the occurrence of any incident worthy of note, and in due time the skiff was run upon the beach in front of the Sportman's Home. We did not see Matt Coyle or any of his family on the way, but we heard of them in less than ten minutes after we arrived at the lake. While Joe and his chums were overhauling the stern locker, in search of the letters they had written the night before, Mr. Swan came up.

"You're here, ain't you?" said he, in his cheery way. "Now you are off for that spring-hole, I suppose Well, if you will go into the woods without a guide to take care of you, No-Man's Pond is the safest place for

you. But you want to watch out for Matt Coyle, no matter where you go. He's down on all you Mount Airy folks, and Rube Royall heard him say that he was intending to tie you to a tree and larrup you."

"Does Matt carry an insurance on his life?" inquired Roy. "If not, he'll think twice before he tries that."

"Who is Rube Royall?" asked Arthur.

"He is acting as watchman at the State hatchery, but he is really in Hanson's employ," replied Mr. Swan. "Of course Rube keeps poachers away from the outlet of nights, but he was hired to watch Matt Coyle. He's too lazy to be a guide, Rube is; but he's honest, and hates Matt as bad as I do."

"Why does Mr. Hanson want to have Matt watched?" asked Joe.

"You remember about the Winchester rifle and Lefever hammerless that were stolen a while back, don't you?" asked the guide. "Well, the men who own them guns are worth anywhere from twenty-five to fifty dollars a day to the hotel they put up at, because they always bring a big crowd with them.

They went home madder'n a couple of wet hens, saying that they would never come to this lake again till their guns had been found and Matt put in jail. We could have arrested Matt long ago, for he's been living with Rube ever since we burned him out; but if we'd done it we should have lost the guns, for Matt would stay in jail till he died there before he would tell where the guns were hidden. He's just that obstinate. However, Rube don't need to watch him any more. Hanson's got the guns, and who do you think brought them to him. It was Tom Bigden and his cousins."

Although I was closely packed in my case I caught every word of the conversation I have recorded, and I assure you I was surprised to hear this. Had Tom complied with Matt's demands and paid him fifty dollars for the guns? Why didn't Joe ask the guide to go into details? Probably he didn't think it worth while, for all he said was—

"I wish those fellows had stayed at home."

"They wouldn't look at the reward, but told Hanson that it was to be give to me and Morris," continued the guide. "Morris has got

his share, but I ain't seen mine, for this is the first time I have been here since the guns were recovered. Now all we've got to do is to arrest Matt and hunt up Jake. That boy's got six thousand dollars hidden somewhere in the woods."

"Why, hasn't that money been found yet?" exclaimed Roy.

"Not yet, and somehow we don't make out to get on Jake's trail. He hasn't been to Rube's house since the day we found your canvas canoe hidden under that pile of brush. He's hiding in the woods, living on what he can shoot and steal. I tell you the outlook is mighty dark for us guides. There's more than two hundred guests gone away since the Irvington bank was robbed, and half of us are idle. Of course our pay goes on, but no honest man wants to take money that he doesn't earn."

"Well, I must say that things have come to a pretty pass when a few vagabonds can shut up two hotels and throw fifty men like Mr. Swan out of employment," said Joe, as the guide went down the beach toward the place where he had left his canoe. "Now that the guns have

been recovered, Matt Coyle ought to be arrested without an hour's delay. I hope he and Jake will be looking through iron bars when we return."

Joe would have put his wish into stronger language than that if he had known what was to happen to him before he saw Indian Lake again.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE WAYRING IN TROUBLE.

MR. SWAN, who had come to Indian Lake to purchase some supplies for his family, took a couple of baskets from his canoe and walked back to the place where Joe Wayring and his friends were standing.

"There's one thing I 'most forgot to tell you," said he, as he came up. "Them three cronies of yours, Tom Bigden and his cousins, are spending their vacation in visiting with Matt Coyle and his family."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Roy and Arthur, in concert.

"Leastwise we think they are," continued the guide, "for they have more to do with Matt than they do with any body else. The boys have often seen them together, and they seem to be as thick as so many thieves."

"That's what we get by sending them word that if they wanted their fishing-rods they

could come and get them," said Joe, after a little pause. "If we had redeemed their property at the time we redeemed ours, Tom and his cousins wouldn't have come here."

"Well, the woods are big enough for all of you, ain't they?" said the guide. "You needn't have any thing to do with 'em if you don't want to."

"We are not sure of that," answered Roy. "We shall not trouble them, but that's no sign that they will keep away and let us alone."

"Why are they having so much to do with Matt Coyle?" said Arthur. "That looks suspicious."

"It does indeed," said Joe, seriously. "I am afraid it means business for us."

"I don't see why it should," replied Mr. Swan. "You stay on this side the lake and let them stay on the other, and you needn't come together at all. They ain't going to tramp twelve miles through the woods to that spring-hole just for the sake of getting into a fuss with you."

"Don't they know that Matt and his boys are in danger of arrest?" asked Arthur.

"Course they know it. They couldn't help it, seeing that they come here every few days after supplies and mail," said the guide. "The guides who saw them talking together didn't know what to make of it, and I don't either."

"There's something between Tom and Matt, and you may depend upon it," said Joe. "It has leaked out in Mount Airy that Tom tried to put Matt up to lots of mischief before he went away. He told the squatter that it would be a good plan for him to burn my father's house, and turn our sailboats adrift so that they would go into the rapids and be smashed to pieces."

"Well, he's a bright feller!" exclaimed the guide. "Don't he know that he will get himself into trouble by that sort of work? There they come now."

The boys turned about and saw three canoes coming toward the landing. The crews who were handling the paddles must have been surprised to see Joe and his chums there, for as soon as they recognized them they stopped and held a short consultation.

Now, although the two opposing factions to

which Tom and Joe belonged felt very bitter toward each other, they had never come to open warfare. They played ball together, always spoke when they met, and tried to be civil; but there was scarcely a boy on either side who would not have been glad to see Tom Bigden neatly thrashed. Prime, Noble, Scott, and the rest of the fellows who made their head-quarters at the Mount Airy drug store disliked him because he had tried to set himself up for a leader among them; and Joe and his friends had no friendship for him because they knew how persistently Tom, aided by his cousins, had tried to injure them ever since he came to the village to live.

"If Tom could point to a single mean thing we ever did to him, I shouldn't be so much surprised at his hostility," Joe often said. "But for him to attempt to ride over us rough shod just because he is jealous of us—that's something we won't put up with. If he had the least spark of manliness in him, he would quit his under-handed work, come out open and above-board, and settle the matter with a fair stand-up fight. But he is too big a coward

to do that, so he tries to sick Matt Coyle onto us."

Having brought their consultation to a close, Tom and his cousins dipped their paddles in the water again and drew up alongside the skiff. If you had been there you would have thought, from the cordial manner in which they greeted Joe and his companions, that they were the best friends in the world.

"Much obliged to you for telegraphing to us about our rods," said Tom. "We've got 'em now, and it will be a cold day when Matt Coyle gets his hands on them again."

"I shouldn't think you would like to associate with that man as freely as you do," said Roy, who could not forget that Tom had tried his best to make one of their canoe meets a failure. "He will spring something on you sure, and I wouldn't have any thing to do with him."

Tom Bigden's amazing assurance was not proof against an assault like this. He turned all sorts of colors, but managed at last to say, in reply—

"You must think I am hard up for associates.

My interviews with Coyle have been purely accidental. I couldn't help speaking to him when he spoke to me. Where are you fellows going?"

"We intend to hunt up some trout-fishing before we go home," answered Arthur.

"Then you'll have to go back to some of the spring-holes," said Loren. "I'll bet there isn't a legal trout in any of the waters about here. They've been fished to death."

Arthur had nothing more to say, for it was no part of his plan to tell Tom just where he and his companions were going. The three boys loitered about for a minute or two, trying to think of something else to talk about, and then they said good-by and walked toward the Sportsman's Home.

"I don't see what there is betwixt you boys," said Mr. Swan, as soon as Tom was out of hearing. "Those fellows seem friendly enough."

"Yes; but we know that they are not to be trusted," replied Joe. "Ralph and Loren are not so very bad, but Tom will do us a mean turn the first good chance he gets."

"He didn't tell the truth when he said that he had met Matt Coyle only by accident," added the guide. "Some of the boys told me that one day last week he waited for Matt Coyle about two miles this side of the hatchery for more than an hour. That looked as though he had made an appointment."

"I wish I had thought to speak to Tom about those guns," observed Roy. "Do you know how he came to get hold of them, Mr. Swan? He must have told some sort of a story when he turned them over to the landlord of the Sportsman's Home."

"I guess you don't believe he come by 'em in a legitimate way," laughed Mr. Swan. "Well, mebbe he didn't; I don't know. He said he found 'em while he and his cousins were roaming about in the woods, hunting squirrels. The place to hunt for them is around cornfields, and not in thick woods."

Having at last found their letters, Joe and his chums slung their camp-baskets over their shoulders, and started for the hotel, talking with the guide as they went, and listening attentively to his instructions regarding the

route they would have to follow in order to reach the spring-hole. They engaged him to look out for their skiff while they were gone, after which they hunted up the storekeeper, from whom they purchased supplies enough to last them a week.

"Going up to No-Man's Pond, be you?" said Morris, the guide who had patched up the hole that Matt Coyle's scow knocked in the skiff on the night the "battle in the dark" took place. "Well, you'll catch plenty of fish, but you will have a hard time getting there. You see, some lazy lout of a guide went to work and filled the carry full of trees and bushes, for fear that he might be called upon to show a guest over there. You will have to pick your way through the thickest woods you ever saw; so you want to go as light as possible."

"We shall take nothing but my canvas canoe, these three camp-baskets, and our rods and guns," replied Joe. "We have a good compass—"

"Well, whatever you do, don't quarrel with it," said Morris. "If you get turned around and see the sun go down in the north, when he

ought to set in the west, don't get frightened and run yourself to death, the way Billy Sawyer done two years ago. Billy had been guide for this country, man and boy, for more than twenty years. The last time I saw him, he was just starting out for the swamp about three miles the other side of No-Man's Pond, intending to spend a month or so in trapping; but we don't think he ever saw the swamp or the pond, either. First he lost his bearings, then he lost his head, then he went tearing through the woods, till he dropped and died of exhaustion within half a mile of the hotel."

"And he was an old guide, you say?" exclaimed Roy.

"Sartin. Guides ain't no more infallible than other folks. I have been lost myself; but my employer didn't know it, I bet you. I kept my head about me, and worked my way out all right. Well, good-by. You can eat supper on the shore of that pond if you hold the direct course; but if you lose it don't grumble at the compass."

The boys knew just how hard it was for a

bewildered person to place implicit faith in the needle, for they had been lost scores of times in the woods in the immediate vicinity of Mount Airy; but they did not get lost this time. Joe Wayring went in advance, carrying me in one hand and the little brass box in the other, and brought his companions to No-Man's Pond, as the spring-hole was called, in ample time to catch and cook a supper of trout and make all the necessary preparations for the night. Twice while we were on the way we came in sight of the portage that led from Indian Lake to the spring-hole, but we could not see any signs of a path. It was completely concealed by the huge trees that that lazy guide had cut across it.

"I wonder if this is the place we're looking for," said Joe, depositing me at the roots of a spreading balsam and taking the camp basket from his back. "It must be. Here are the mountains on three sides of us and the hills on the other, and over there is the golden bathing beach that Mr. Swan told us of. Hi yi! Did you see that?" he added, as a monster trout showed himself above the water within

easy casting distance of the edge of the lily-pads.

"I should say so," replied Arthur. "I don't care whether this is No-Man's Pond or not; there are big trout in it, and this is a splendid place to build a shanty. Now let's get to work. Who will put the canvas canoe together and catch supper for us? who will cut the wood and pick browse for the beds? and who will throw up a roof of some sort for us to sleep under to-night? Most any thing will do, as there are no signs of rain. To-morrow we will pitch in, all hands, and put up a good house.

"I'll pick the browse," said Roy, who was lying prone upon the leaves fanning himself with his hat. "I'm just tired enough to do such lazy work. I'll tell you what's a fact, fellows: If I were Mr. Hanson, and could find out what guide it was who choked up that portage, I'd never give him another day's employment as long as he and I lived. I am tired to death and roasted besides."

The others said they were too, but they did not waste time in grumbling over it. They set to

work at once, Arthur clearing the leaves from the ground on which he intended to erect the lean-to, while Joe took me from my case and made me ready for business. After that he put Fly-rod together, fastened a couple of flies to his leader, and shoved through the lily-pads to catch that big trout, or others like him, for supper. By that time Roy Sheldon had mustered up energy enough to take his double-bladed ax from his basket and go in search of firewood. They worked to such good purpose, one and all, that, by the time the sun went down and darkness settled over the spring-hole, they were ready for the night. The browse lay a foot deep all over the floor of the lean-to; the beds were made up side by side, with a pillow (a little bag of unbleached muslin, left open at both ends and stuffed with browse) at the head of each; the fire had burned down to a glowing bed of coals, over which the trout and coffee-pot were simmering and sputtering; and the whole was lighted up by the Ferguson jack-lamp which hung suspended from a clipped bough close at hand. A tramp of twelve miles on an August day,

through a wilderness so dense that not the faintest breath of air can reach you is no joke; and it was little wonder that the boys were too tired to talk. They ate their trout and johnny-cake and sipped their weak coffee in silence, and then crawled to their beds under the lean-to without thinking to wash the dishes; although that was a disagreeable duty they seldom neglected. They slept soundly, too, in blissful ignorance of the fact that there was another camp within less than three miles of the spring-hole, and that the owners of that camp were looking for them.

Nine hours' sleep has a wonderfully rejuvenating effect upon a healthy boy; and when our three friends left their blankets at five o'clock the next morning, and started on a keen run toward the "golden bathing beach" before spoken of, they were their own jolly, uneasy selves again. A hasty dip in the water, which was so cold that they could not long remain in it, two or three hotly contested races along the beach to get up a reaction, followed by a vigorous rubbing with coarse towels, put them in the right trim for more trout

and johnny-cake ; and the trout and johnny-cake put them in the humor for the work that must be done if their sojourn at the spring-hole was to be a pleasant one. The Indian Lake wilderness was noted for its sudden and violent storms, and when they came the boys meant to be ready for them. They did not forget to wash the dishes this time, and then Arthur and Joe went to work to build the shanty, while Roy busied himself in collecting a supply of fuel and building a range.

If you have never passed a vacation in the woods, you probably do not know that a camp fire and a camp range are two different things. The first is made directly in front of the open part of the shanty, and is intended for warmth and comfort, and for light, also, when you have no lantern or jack-lamp. The range is built off on one side, a little out of the way, and is made by placing two green logs, five or six feet long, and eight inches in diameter, side by side on the ground, about a foot apart at one end, and nearly touching at the other. The open end of the range is placed to windward—that is, in the direction from which the wind

blows—to create a draft, and the upper sides of the logs are hewn off square with an ax, so that the pots, pans, and kettles will stay where they are put, and not slip off into the fire. You build a hard-wood fire between these logs, and when it has stopped blazing and burned a thick bed of coals you are ready to begin your cooking. To facilitate the handling of hot dishes on the range, Joe Wayring had a pair of light blacksmith's tongs, with the jaws curved instead of straight. This was the handiest little tool I ever saw. With its aid Joe could pour out coffee, dish up soup, and remove the frying-pan from the range; and, as the tongs were always cold, no one ever saw him dancing about the fire with burned fingers.

The boys worked until three o'clock without even stopping for lunch, and then Roy got into the canvas canoe and pushed out to catch trout enough for supper, while Arthur cut down evergreens to furnish fresh browse for the beds. It was about this time that I introduced them to you in the first chapter. Joe Wayring had just put the finishing touches upon the

shanty (I didn't wonder that he was satisfied with it, for Mr. Swan himself could not have put up a neater little house) and started the conversation with which I commenced my story. He gave it as his opinion that their camp was well out of Tom Bigden's reach, and that Matt Coyle and his boys were much too indolent to walk twelve miles through a thick wood just to get into a fight with them; and at the very moment he said it some of those whose names he had mentioned were trying their best to find him.

Having disposed of their late dinner and cleaned up the camp, the boys were at liberty to lie around under the trees and rest. This, for a wonder, Joe Wayring was quite willing to do; but Roy and Arthur suddenly took it into their heads that they would like to explore the spring-hole and see how big it was and what it looked like.

"Well, go on," said Joe, "and I will stay here and keep up the fire and rest. Two are enough to ride in that canoe. Take your rods and catch some trout for breakfast. You

ought to have fine sport, for they are jumping up in every direction."

Roy and Arthur thought it best to act upon this suggestion, and from force of habit they also put their guns into the canoe before shoving out into the spring-hole. That was one of the luckiest things those two boys ever did.

By the time they had made two hundred yards from shore, the voyagers discovered that No-Man's Pond was not a circular basin, as it appeared to be when viewed from the beach in front of their camp. Its shape was very irregular. Numerous long points jutted into the water from both sides, and behind these points were secluded bays in which numberless flocks of wood duck lived unmolested by any enemy save the bald eagles that now and then swooped down and carried off one of their number for dinner.

The boys paddled up on one side of the spring-hole and down the other, going entirely around it and exploring all the little bays and inlets in their course, seeing nothing in the shape of game except the ducks, which quickly sought concealment under the broad leaves of

the lily-pads, and finally they dropped anchor in the mouth of a little brook that emptied into the pond, and jointed their rods. It did not take them more than twenty minutes to catch their next morning's breakfast. In fact, the trout were so eager to take their flies, sometimes jumping clear out of the water to meet them, that the sport was robbed of all excitement.

"I would as soon fish in an aquarium," said Roy, as he pulled his rod apart and shoved it into its case. "I like to angle for trout, but this suits me too well. What would some of Mr. Hanson's guests, who haven't caught a legal fish this season, give to be here with us? Let's go to camp and see what friend Joe is doing."

For some reason or other the boys did not sing and shout, as they usually did on occasions like this. Arthur lay at full length in the bow, his chin resting on his arms, which were crossed over the gunwales, and Roy plied the paddle with so much skill that it scarcely made a ripple in the water. As we came noiselessly around the point that obstructed our

view of the upper end of the spring-hole, Arthur uttered an ejaculation of astonishment and alarm, raised himself to a sitting posture with so much haste that he came within a hair's breadth of capsizing me, and reached for his gun, while Roy sat with open mouth and staring eyes, holding his paddle suspended in the air, and looking in the direction of the camp. I looked too, and if I had possessed a heart the scene that met my gaze would have set it to beating like a trip-hammer.

Joe Wayring was no longer lying at his ease under the shade of the evergreens. He was standing with his face to a tree, which he seemed to be clasping with his white, sinewy arms; his back was bared, and he was looking over his shoulder at Matt Coyle, who stood behind and a little to one side of him, rolling up his sleeves. Near by stood Sam, and Jake, each holding a heavy switch in his hand.

In an instant I comprehended the situation—or thought I did. I had heard Matt declare, in savage tones, that some day he and his boys would tie Joe Wayring to a tree and larrup him till he'd wish that he and his crowd had

minded their own business; and now Matt was about to carry his threat into execution. He meant to do his work well, when he got at it; for, in addition to the switches that Jake and Sam held in their hands, I saw several others lying on the ground beside them. I had never dreamed that the enmity Matt cherished toward my master was so intense and bitter that it would lead him to go twelve miles out of his way to wreak vengeance upon him, and it was a mystery to me how he ever found out that Joe and his two chums were camping in this particular spot. I did not believe that Matt had come there by accident, and he hadn't, either, as I afterward learned. He and his boys were on Joe's trail within three hours after he left Indian Lake, and they had been looking for him ever since, being urged on by something besides a desire for revenge, as I gained from the very first words I heard the squatter utter.

When we rounded the point we were within less than thirty yards of our camp, and in plain sight of it; but its occupants were so deeply interested in their own affairs that they

did not see us. I felt a thrill of indignation run all through me when I caught a glimpse of my master's pale face, and was proud of him when I saw that there were no signs of cringing in him. Matt bared his brawny arm clear to the shoulder, caught up a switch, gave it a flourish or two to make sure that it would stand the work to which he intended to put it, and then said in a loud voice, as if he were addressing some one on the other side of the spring-hole:

"Now, then, where is it? You see that we are in dead 'arnest, I reckon, don't you? What have you done with it?"

"I tell you I don't know any thing about it," said Joe's clear, ringing voice in reply. "I never saw it."

For some reason or other these words seemed to set Jake Coyle beside himself. He yelled like a wild Indian, leaped from the ground, and made his heavy switch whistle as it cut the air in close proximity to the prisoner's unprotected back. As soon as he could speak plainly he shouted—

"You have seed it too, an' you do know

somethin' about it. Whoop! Put it onto him, pap, or else stand away from there an' let me get at him. Don't you mind how he slapped me in the face with that paddle of your'n? An' now he's gone an' stole—"

"Don't be in a hurry, Jakey," interrupted Matt. "Your turn'll come after I get through with him. I'll let you at him directly. Look here," he went on, once more addressing himself to Joe. "You won't get no help from your friends, an' you needn't look for it. When we was comin' through the woods, we seen 'em puttin' for Injun Lake tight as they could go. Didn't we, Jakey? Now if you will ax our parding for your meanness to us, an' tell us where it is, we'll let you off easy. What do you say?"

"I say I won't do it," answered Joe, in undaunted tones. "I shan't ask your pardon, and you can't make me. I haven't done any thing to you."

"You ain't?" roared Matt, drawing back the switch as if he were about to let it fall on Joe's back. "Don't you call drivin' honest folks outen Mount Airy 'cause they ain't got

no good clothes to w'ar, an' keepin' 'em from earnin' a livin' that they've got jest as good a right to as you rich ones have—don't you call that doin' somethin'?"

"And furthermore," continued Joe, "I tell you, for the last time, that I don't know any thing about that money. I never saw it."

"Whoop!" shouted Jake, going off into another war-dance. "You have seed it, an' you know all about it. You had them two grip-sacks into your baskets, you an' your friends did, when you left Injun Lake to come up yer. Tom Bigden said so."

"Whoop!" yelled Matt, in his turn. "Now you've done it, you fule! Didn't that Bigden boy say plain enough that he didn't want you to speak his name at all? See if that won't put some gumption into your thick head; an' that, an' that! I'll learn you to find six thousand dollars, an' go an' hide it from your pap, an' then let fellers like Joe Wayring steal it from you, you ongrateful scamp."

Jake was generally on the lookout for sudden bursts of fury on the part of his sire, but

this time he was taken by surprise. Before he could dodge or stir an inch from his tracks, he received a most unmerciful beating, one that gave me a faint idea of what was in store for Joe Wayring. When he turned to run, the face he presented to our view was bleeding in half a dozen places.

"There, now," exclaimed Matt, who was almost frantic. "Go an' hide some more money from your pap, an' blab when you was told to hold your jaw, won't you? Now that I have got my hand in, I reckon I might as well finish with you," he continued, turning back and taking his stand behind the prisoner. "Once more I ax you: Will you tell me where you have hid that money?"

"I have nothing more to say," replied Joe, in an unfaltering voice.

The answer added fuel to the fire of Matt's rage. He moistened his hand and seized the switch with a firmer hold, while Joe turned his face to the tree and nerved himself to receive the expected blow. That was more than Arthur Hasting could endure; but it brought his scattered wits back to him. In an instant

his double barrel was at his shoulder, and his flashing eye was looking along the rib.

"Hold on there!" he shouted. "If you touch that boy I will put more holes through you than you ever saw in a skimmer. Throw down that gad and stand where you are."

The effect of these words was magical. Jake Coyle, whose doleful howls of anguish had awakened a thousand echoes among the surrounding hills, suddenly ceased his lamentations; the white face of Joe Wayring turned toward us lighted up with hope; and Matt and Sam looked at Arthur and his threatening gun with eyes that seemed to have grown to the size of saucers. For a second or two no one moved or spoke; then one of the three marauders gave a perfect imitation of the cry of alarm the mother grouse utters when her brood is menaced with danger, whereupon Matt and his boys disappeared in the most bewildering way. They were seen to drop where they stood, and that was the last of them. Although Arthur rose to his feet as quickly as

he could and Roy plied the paddle with all his strength, they did not catch another glimpse of the squatter, nor was there the slightest rustling in the bushes to tell which way he and his allies had gone.

CHAPTER IX.

TOM VISITS THE HATCHERY.

LET us now return to Tom Bigden, whom we last saw paddling disconsolately toward the camp where he had left his cousins, Ralph and Loren Farnsworth, a short half hour before. Tom had expected to spend a pleasant forenoon at the hatchery, taking lessons in fish-culture; but his interview with Matt Coyle had knocked that in the head. The squatter's astounding proposition, taken in connection with the dreadful things he had threatened to do in case his victim failed to comply with his demands, had opened Tom's eyes to the disagreeable fact that he had overreached himself by yielding to his insane desire to take vengeance on Joe Waring. He knew he could not enjoy himself at the hatchery with the fear of exposure and disgrace hanging over him, so he started for camp at his best pad-

dling pace to ask Ralph and Loren what he should do about it.

"When a fellow like Matt Coyle can lay commands upon me and threaten me with punishment if I do not obey them—by gracious! Is it possible for me to get any lower down in the world? I wish I had never heard of that Joe Wayring. Every thing seems to go smoothly with him without an effort on his part, but, no matter how hard I try, every thing goes wrong with me. Did any body ever hear of such luck?"

Tom was angry now as well as frightened, and, what seemed strange to me when I heard of it, he blamed Joe Wayring, and not himself, for the troubles he had got into. He must have brought a very black face into camp with him, for when he ran the bow of his canoe upon the beach in front of the grove where Loren and Ralph were idling away the time in their hammocks the former called out:

"Hallo! who are you mad at now?"

"Every body," snarled Tom. "Say, Ralph, you remember that after our interview with the squatter, on the day the constable drove

him out of Mount Airy, you declared that you wouldn't have had it happen for any thing, don't you?"

"I remember it perfectly," replied Ralph. "I was afraid that trouble of some sort would grow out of it, and judging from the looks of your face my fears have been realized. What's up?"

"That was the first interview I held with Matt Coyle, but I am sorry to say it wasn't the last," continued Tom.

"Have you seen him to-day?" exclaimed Loren.

"I have, and I tell you he's got me in a box. But hold on a minute. I want to let you into a secret. It was I who put it into his head to steal Joe Wayring's canvas canoe."

"There," said Ralph, shaking his finger at his brother. "What did I tell you?"

"That's no secret at all," answered Loren. "We were satisfied from the first that you knew all about it. You looked very surprised and innocent, and I know you were mad when you discovered that Matt had robbed you as well as the rest of us; but you didn't play

your part well enough to ward off all suspicion."

These words added to Tom's fears. "Do you think Joe suspected me?" he inquired.

"If he did, he made no sign," replied Loren. "Perhaps one reason why Ralph and I suspected you was because we could read you better than Joe could. Well, what of it?"

"Well," said Tom, desperately, "Matt Coyle tells me that, as an accessory before the fact, I am liable to punishment at the hands of the law. That is what he is working on. You have heard that he stole a couple of valuable guns from an unguarded camp a few weeks ago. There has been a reward of one hundred dollars offered for the recovery of those guns, and, as Matt dare not take them up to the Sportsman's Home himself, he demands that I shall act as his agent, and share the reward with him."

"Demands?" repeated Loren.

"But before he will give the guns into my possession, I must pay him fifty dollars, cash in hand," added Tom. "Yes, sir; he *demands*

that I shall do this under penalty of being denounced to the officers of the law."

"Whew!" whistled Ralph. "Here *is* a go!"

"That Matt Coyle has more cheek than you showed on the day of the canoe meet, when you purposely capsized Frank Noble and claimed foul on it," said Loren. "Are you going to give him the money?"

"He'll have to; he can't get out of it. But here's where the trouble is going to come in," said Ralph, who was by no means thick-headed if he did hate books. "The minute Tom gives him fifty dollars for those guns, that minute he puts himself completely in the villain's power."

"That was the way I looked at it," said Tom. "But what can I do? What would you do if you were in my place?"

"The sight of those fifty dollars will show that lazy Matt how he can make a very nice income without doing a stroke of work," continued Ralph. "He'll go on stealing, and as fast as he accumulates property he will make Tom buy it of him, no matter whether there is

a reward offered for it or not. There is only one thing you can do. You had better start for home bright and early to-morrow morning, get fifty dollars of your father, if he will give it to you, hand it over to Matt as soon as you can find him, and then shake the dust of the Indian Lake country from your feet forever, or at least until that squatter has been placed behind prison bars."

"But Matt says I need not hope to escape him by going home," said Tom. "He reminded me that a constable can catch me in Mount Airy as easily as he can here."

"That's so," assented Ralph, "but what other show have you? When you give him the money you will put him in good humor, and I don't think he will denounce you until he has had some sort of a row with you. You must keep him good-natured."

"And the only way I can do that is by keeping his pockets full," said Tom, with a groan. "I won't do it. I'll give him the fifty dollars, because I can't help myself; and when I part from him he will never see me again. My

supply of spending money is not as generous as it might be, and Matt shall not see a dollar of it."

"Here's another point," said Loren, swinging himself from his hammock. "Matt is going to be arrested some day, and what assurance have we that he won't tell all he knows?"

"We haven't any," said Tom, fiercely; and then, to the surprise of both his cousins, he broke out into the wildest kind of a tirade against Joe Wayring and every body who was a friend to him. Knowing that they could not stop him, they let him go on and talk himself out of breath.

"I'd like to see something happen to that boy, for if it hadn't been for him and his chums I never would have been in this fix," said Tom, at last. "Because we wouldn't toady to them, they slammed the door of the archery club in our faces, and went against us in every way they knew how. Well, it is a long lane that has no turning, and we may come out at the top of the heap yet. Will you fellows stand by me? I mean will you go

home with me, and come back when I get the money?"

Ralph and Loren gave it as their opinion that their cousin Tom ought to know better than to ask such a question. Hadn't they always stood by him, through thick and thin, and made common cause with him against every one he did not like? Of course they would stay with him until his trouble with Matt Coyle was settled, and do all they could to help him.

"I'm glad to hear it, for I should dreadfully hate to be left to myself in an emergency like this," said Tom. "But we haven't a single hour to lose. Matt said he would give me ten days to go to Mount Airy and return, and we ought to start to-morrow. Which one of you will go to the hotel with me after a supply of grub?"

"Let Ralph go," said Loren. "He's treasurer. I will stay here and look out for things about the camp, and perhaps I shall be able to think up some way for you to wriggle out of Matt Coyle's clutches."

Ralph, weary of loafing about the camp and

glad of an opportunity to stretch his arms, readily agreed to accompany his cousin to the Sportsman's Home and buy the provisions they would need while on their way to Mount Airy. The two set out at once, and when they came back at dark they had a startling story to tell the camp-keeper. The Irvington bank had been robbed of six thousand dollars, and the thieves had been traced to Indian Lake.

"I should think there were rascals enough here already," said Loren, after he had listened to all the particulars.

"They keep coming in all the while," replied Ralph, "and the landlords don't like it very well. It's hurting their business. The sportsmen, especially those who have women and children with them, are leaving as fast as they can pack up. We'll be off to-morrow, and I hope we shall never come here for another outing. Tom, are you sure you can take us straight to the creek that leads from the pond to the Indian river? You know we told you that, in the absence of a guide, we should depend on you to show us the way home."

"Don't be uneasy," was Tom's confident

answer. "I have a good many landmarks to go by, and I'll not take you an inch out of a direct line."

Of course there was but one thing talked about around that camp fire between supper time and the hour for retiring, and that was the attempt on the part of Matt Coyle to make a receiver of stolen property out of Tom Bigden. The longer they dwelt upon it the darker Tom's prospects seemed to become. The fear of what the squatter could do, if he made up his mind to be ugly, effectually banished sleep from their eyes for the greater part of the night; and the consequence was that when they arose from their beds of browse the next morning they were too cross and snappish to be civil to one another. During the time that was consumed in cooking and eating breakfast, packing the canoes, and getting under way, they did not speak half a dozen words aloud; but they all kept up a good deal of thinking, and no doubt it was while Tom was in a fit of abstraction that he lost his way. At any rate, he left the lake at least two miles below the point at which he ought to have left

it. He turned into the creek up which Matt Coyle and his boys fled on the morning following their encounter with Joe Wayring and his chums, and Ralph and Loren blindly followed his lead. Not until they made a landing, about two o'clock in the afternoon, to eat their lunch, did Tom begin to suspect that he was a little out of his reckoning. If they had come there a few hours sooner, they would have seen Mr. Swan and his party; for, as luck would have it, they had landed within a short distance of Matt Coyle's old camp.

"I am obliged to confess that I am any thing but a trustworthy guide for this neck of the woods," said Tom, after he had looked in vain for some of the landmarks of which he had spoken the day before. "I don't think I ever saw this place until this moment."

"Well, I am sure I have," said Loren. "On our way down we camped within sight of that leaning tree over there. Didn't we, Ralph?"

"I think so. I am quite sure I shot at an eagle on that same leaning tree. You fellows fix the lunch, and I will very soon find out whether I am right or wrong," said Ralph,

getting upon his feet and shoving a cartridge into each barrel of his gun. "If this is the place I think it is, I shall find a little clearing back here about a hundred yards, grown up to briers. Don't you remember we picked a few berries there on the way down?"

"I haven't forgotten about the berries, but I don't think you will find that or any other clearing in these thick woods," answered Tom. "But go ahead and look, and we will have the lunch ready by the time you get back."

Ralph shouldered his gun and disappeared among the evergreens. He was gone about ten minutes, and then Tom and Loren heard him calling to them in an excited voice.

"Oh, fellows! Oh, fellows!" shouted Ralph. "Come here. Come as quick as you know how."

Tom and his cousin were in no hurry to obey this peremptory summons. They did not know what they might find back there in the bushes. Their faces turned white, and the hands with which they pushed the cartridges into their guns trembled visibly.

"Are you coming?" cried Ralph impatiently.

"What have you found?" Loren managed to ask, in reply.

"Something that will make you open your eyes," was the answer. "But it won't hurt you. Why don't you come on?"

These reassuring words brought Tom and Loren to their feet and took them into the evergreens; but it was not without fear and trembling that they slowly worked their way toward the place from which Ralph's voice sounded, nor did they neglect to hold themselves in readiness to take to their heels the instant they saw any thing alarming. They reached Ralph's side at last, and were astonished beyond measure to find him holding a Victoria gun-case in one hand and an elegant double-barrel hammerless in the other. As they came up he raised the hand that held the case, directing their attention to a finely finished Winchester rifle that rested against a log near by.

"What's the meaning of this? Where did

you find them?" exclaimed Tom, as soon as he had found his tongue.

Before speaking Ralph stepped to the end of the log and pointed to the hollow in it. Then he picked up a bush that appeared to have been lately cut, and laid it across the opening.

"That's the way it was when I came along here a few minutes ago," said he. "I stumbled against something, and when I looked to see what it was I found that I had kicked this bush away and exposed the opening. As I was searching for that blackberry-patch, and nothing else, I was about to pass on, when something glittering caught my eye. It was the buckle on this gun-case. That's my answer to your second question, Tom. In reply to your first, I say: It means that you need have no further trouble with Matt Coyle, and you needn't ask your father for that money."

"Do—do you think these are the stolen guns?" stammered Tom.

"Of course they are," said Loren, confidently. "That one by the log is a Winchester, and I see the name Lefever on this. I tell you, old fellow, you are in luck."

"For once in my life I believe I am," said Tom, taking the double-barrel from his cousin's hand and giving it a good looking over. "Seen any signs of the berry-patch, Ralph?"

"Never a sign."

"And you won't see any in this part of the country, either," answered Tom. "We missed our way, and that was a very fortunate thing for me. I've got the weather-gauge of Matt Coyle now. Let's eat our lunch and start back for our old camp."

So saying Tom shouldered the Lefever hammerless and turned his face toward the creek, Loren following with the Victoria case in his hand, and Ralph bringing up the rear with the Winchester. They had many a hearty laugh at Matt Coyle's expense, but when they sat down to lunch they began to look at the matter seriously.

"You've got the upper hand of him now, and you want to keep it," said Ralph. "I don't think it would be quite safe for you to defy him."

"By no means," replied Tom. "I have no

intention of doing any thing of the sort. I shall have an interview with him at the earliest possible moment, and tell him when he produces the guns I will give him his money. I can't be expected to fill my part of the contract until he fills his; and that's something he can't do, thanks to Ralph. Why, boys, I feel as if I had got rid of an awful load."

For the first time since he came to Mount Airy to live Tom Bigden was perfectly happy. According to his way of looking at it, he had turned the tables on the squatter very neatly, and any sensible boy would have said that the best thing he could do was to keep clear of that low fellow in future. But he did not do it. Scarcely a week passed away before his hatred for Joe Wayring led him into a worse scrape than the one from which he had just been extricated by his cousin's lucky discovery.

I must not forget to say that while the boys were lounging about on the bank of the creek, eating their bacon and cracker, there was something going on in the woods behind them. Every thing they did while they were standing

beside that hollow log, examining the guns that had been found in it, was seen, and every word they uttered had been overheard by a young ragamuffin who was concealed within less than a stone's throw of them. Ralph Farnsworth had come upon him so suddenly that he did not have time to run far. He shook both his fists in the air and gnashed his teeth with rage when he saw Tom and his cousins walk away with the guns in their possession, and as soon as they were out of sight he came from his place of concealment and crept toward the log on all-fours. But he did not stop there. He simply glanced at the hollow as he passed and presently disappeared in a thicket on the opposite side. When he came into view again he was closely hugging two small valises, one under each arm. The angry scowl was gone from his face, and he was grinning broadly and going through a variety of uncouth antics, expressive, no doubt, of great satisfaction and delight. He stopped and listened, and the sounds that came to his ears told him that Tom Bigden and his companions were shoving off in their canoes and heading down the creek

toward the lake. When their voices died away in the distance he bent himself almost double, and moved off with long, noiseless strides.

The three canoeists reached their camp in the grove long before dark, for the swift current in the creek helped them along at the rate of three miles an hour. Tom's first care was to make sure of the guns; and these he at once proceeded to hide in the thick branches of an evergreen, while his cousins cut wood, made the fire, and cooked the supper. They had brought very light hearts back with them, but one of their number, at least, did not sleep any the better for it. It was Tom, who grew uneasy every time he thought of the coming interview with the squatter, which he hoped to bring about on the following day. How was it going to end? That was the question Tom kept asking himself, and when he saw the day breaking, after an almost sleepless night, he had not found a satisfactory answer to it.

"I suppose we ought to go to the Sportsman's Home at once and give those guns up," said Loren, as he raked the coals together and threw

on an armful of fresh fuel. "We'll not touch the reward, of course."

"Certainly not," replied Ralph. "But I would freely give a hundred dollars, if I had it, to see Matt Coyle shut up for a long term of years."

"But he will have a trial before he is shut up, and there is no knowing what secrets he may tell while that trial is in progress," said Loren.

"You don't know how that thought worries me," said Tom. "It is on my mind continually. I wish you fellows wouldn't give up the guns until I have seen Matt."

"What good will it do to keep them?" asked Loren.

"I don't know that it will do any good; but I should like to be with you when you hand them over to Mr. Hanson. I can't go up to the Sportsman's Home to-day, for I have a most disagreeable piece of work to do first. The sooner I get that off my hands, the sooner I shall feel easy."

Tom ate but little breakfast, for he seemed to have lost all desire for food. He drank

a cup of coffee, and then arose to his feet and said good-by, adding, as he pushed his canoe from the beach and stepped into it—

"I shall have something to tell you when I come back. I don't know whether it will be good or bad, but when I see you again I shall know more than I do now."

"Where are you going?"

"Down to the hatchery. It was while I was on my way there day before yesterday that I met Matt. I have an idea that he hangs out somewhere in that neighborhood."

Tom passed a very pleasant hour with the superintendent, who showed him every thing of interest there was to be seen about the hatchery, and took much pains to make all the little details of the science clear to him, even going back to the time of the Romans, among whom, it is stated by several writers, the art approached a remarkable degree of perfection; but it is doubtful if Tom knew any more about fishes when he went away than he did when he came. He was thinking of Matt Coyle, to whom the superintendent incidentally

referred during the progress of the conversation.

"When we first came here, of course we were empty-handed," said he. "We set the traps in the outlet to catch fish so that we could get their eggs; but a few vagabonds of the Coyle stamp made it their business to cut our nets almost as fast as we could put them in. When we threatened to have them arrested, they replied that we had better let them alone or they would set fire to the hatchery. They said they would fish where they pleased, and nobody should stop them; but they have thought better of it, and don't bother us any now. Matt Coyle and his boys are the worst of the lot. They steal every thing they eat and wear, but so far they have not interfered with us. When they do, we shall have them arrested, Hanson or no Hanson."

"What has he to do with it?" inquired Tom. "Doesn't he want them to be arrested?"

"Not just yet; not until he has recovered two stolen guns Matt has in his possession,"

answered the superintendent. "That is a matter of dollars and cents to both the hotels at the lake, for if those guns are not restored to their owners the landlords will be ruined."

"Perhaps if he were shut up for a while he would lose heart, and tell where the guns could be found," suggested Tom.

"Swan and the other guides who know him think differently. That was my idea, and I urged it upon the guides, for I wanted that villain and all his tribe out of my way. But Swan says Matt is a man who can't be driven. However, Rube has his eye on him, and perhaps he will discover something one of these days."

"Who is Rube?" asked Tom.

"Our watchman. He used to be one of Hanson's guides; but he proved too lazy for the business, so Hanson induced us to bring him down here to watch the hatchery and act as spy upon Matt's movements at the same time. When Swan and his friends destroyed Matt's camp Rube took him into his house. He and his family are there now, and Rube is trying the best he knows how to get into their

confidence so that they will tell him where these guns are concealed. I ought, perhaps, to say that three members of the family are at Rube's house now. Where the other is no one seems to know. Yesterday morning the sheriff made an attempt to arrest Jake, but the family got warning in time, took to the woods, and Jake hasn't come back yet."

"What had he been doing?" inquired Tom, who was much more interested in this than he was in the science of fish-culture.

"You heard about the Irvington bank robbery, didn't you? Well, every thing goes to prove that the six thousand dollars the thieves secured is now in Jake Coyle's hands."

This was the most astounding piece of news that Tom Bigden had ever listened to. "How did Jake get hold of it?" he asked.

"Well, the sheriff summoned a posse, caught the robbers after a short chase, and they told him that the boy they hired to ferry them over the lake, and who was robbing a cellar when they first spoke to him, capsized them on purpose and spilled the money out into the water. You see Jake caught a glimpse

of the money when one of the robbers opened his valise to pay him the five dollars he demanded for ferrying them over, and made up his mind to have it for his own."

"I had no idea Jake Coyle was smart enough to do a thing like that," said Tom, who could scarcely credit his ears. "Do you believe the story?"

"Why, the guides tell me that the whole family are sharper than steel traps. Of course I believe the story. On the way home the sheriff ran upon a canvas canoe that Matt stole from Joe Wayring up in Sherwin's Pond, and the robbers recognized it the minute it was put together as the one in which they had started to cross the lake. When the sheriff heard this he knew at once that the ferryman was Jake Coyle, and nobody else, for he is the one who steals all the grub for the family. When they came here to be set across the outlet they surrounded Rube's house with the intention of arresting Jake, but he and the rest had been warned, as I told you, and could not be found. After that the sheriff took one of the robbers up the lake to point out the snag

on which Jake capsized the canvas canoe, but the money wasn't there."

"Have you any idea what had become of it?"

"I haven't the least doubt that Jake went up there night before last, dived for the valises and took them off in the woods and hid them. That is what the sheriff thinks, and it is the plan he is working on."

"I am glad I went to the hatchery this morning," thought Tom, as he pulled slowly toward camp after thanking the accommodating official for the pains he had taken to teach him something. "I have had a good time, and I have heard one or two things that may be of use to me."

CHAPTER X.

MORE TROUBLE FOR TOM BIGDEN.

WHILE on his way from his camp to the hatchery Tom Bigden had kept as close to the beach as the depth of the water would permit, looking everywhere for Matt Coyle, but without seeing any thing of him. Better luck, however, awaited him on his return, for when he came opposite to a lonely part of the beach, near the spot on which their former interview was held, he saw the squatter step cautiously out the bushes and beckon to him. No doubt the man was surprised at the readiness with which Tom brought his canoe around and headed it for the shore.

"Say," exclaimed Matt, when Tom had come within speaking distance. "I'm powerful glad to see you, 'cause I want to let you know that I can't wait no ten days for them fifty dollars. I must have it to onct."

"What's your hurry?" asked Tom. He did not exhibit any signs of anger, although the man was even more peremptory and domineering than he had been before. Tom knew that the squatter's triumph would be of short duration, and he could afford to let him be as insolent as he pleased.

"I'm goin' to buy some furnitur' of Rube, an' he won't let it go less'n he gets the cash in his hands first," answered Matt.

"What do you want of furniture while you are living in Rube's house? Why can't you use his?"

"How do you happen to know that I am livin' into Rube's house?" demanded the squatter, opening his eyes.

"Why, every body knows it," replied Tom, carelessly. "It is pretty well known, too, that you narrowly escaped capture when the sheriff's posse surrounded that house the other morning. Where are you living now, and what has become of Jake?"

"Say," replied Matt, speaking in the confidential tone that had so exasperated Tom on a former occasion. "I don't mind telling you

all about it. Things is gettin' too public around Rube's house to suit us, an', besides, we don't think he's the friend to us that he pertends to be; so we're goin' to take to the bresh, an' there we're goin' to stay. I want some chairs an' bed fixin's to furnish my shanty, when I get it built. Rube's got 'em, but he wants the ready money for 'em. I seen you when you was down there to the hatchery, an' that's the reason I come up here to ketch you."

"All right," said Tom. "How soon can you produce those guns?"

"I can have 'em here to-morrer mornin' by sun-up."

"That's too early for me," replied Tom. "We have breakfast about six, and I can get here by seven; I will be here."

"Not to-morrer?" exclaimed Matt.

"Yes, to-morrow."

"But you said you would have to go to Mount Airy after the money."

"I have seen my cousins since then, and I find that it will not be necessary for me to go home."

"Have you got the money?" said Matt, eagerly.

Tom winked first one eye and then the other.

"There, now. I knowed you had it all the time; but you kind of thought you could beat me in some way or other, an' that you could get out of buyin' them guns. But you know better now, don't you? I want to be friends with you, but I tell you, pine-plank, that I won't stand no nonsense. I'll tell on you sure, if you—"

"Now, don't switch off on that track, for if you do I'll not listen to another word," said Tom, angrily; and to show that he was in earnest he pushed his canoe away from the beach and turned the bow up the lake.

Then there was a short pause, during which Matt stood with his hands on his hips and his eyes fastened searchingly upon the boy's face. It was beginning to dawn upon him that Tom was a trifle more independent than he had been.

"Say," he growled at last. "What trick are you up to?"

"Why, what makes you think I am up to

any trick?" asked Tom, innocently. "You said you wanted me to buy those guns for fifty dollars; and I say I will be ready to do it to-morrow morning. Is there any trick about that?"

"You're goin' to bring a constable with you," Matt almost shouted. The thought popped into his head suddenly, and made him dance with rage.

"I shall come alone," was the quiet reply.

"There ain't no one constable in the Injun Lake country that can take me up," Matt went on, furiously. "But if you do bring one on 'em with you, I'll tell him that you was knowin' to my stealin' of that canvas canoe."

"What's the use of lashing yourself into a tempest for nothing?" said Tom, coolly. "You can hide in the bushes, and if you see any one with me you need not come out. I'll be here at seven o'clock, and when you put those two guns into my canoe I will put fifty dollars in greenbacks into your hand. Is that the understanding?"

"Don't you want me to hide 'em a piece back in the bresh so't you can say that you

found 'em?" inquired Matt, in rather more civil tones.

"No; I want you to put them into my canoe. I will find them there, won't I? Is it a bargain or not?"

"It's a bargain. I'll be here; an' if you ain't—"

The squatter did not say what he would do if Tom failed to appear at the appointed hour, for the latter did not linger to listen to him. He put his canoe in motion again and pulled toward the point above, while Matt backed up to a log and took his pipe from his pocket.

"Something's wrong somewheres," he told himself, as he filled up for a smoke. "He didn't act that-a-way t'other day, but was as humble as a hound purp that had jest been licked. Now, what's in the wind, do you reckon? Has he been snoopin' round in the woods an' found them six—whoop!"

The bare thought that perhaps Tom had stumbled upon the valises, and intended paying him for the stolen guns out of the money that Matt regarded as his own, was enough to drive the man frantic. He sprang to his feet,

jammed his pipe into his pocket, caught up his rifle, which he had placed behind a convenient tree, and dashed into the bushes.

"I wonder how Mr. Coyle feels by this time," chuckled Tom, as he rounded the point and left the place of meeting out of sight. "My face must be an awful tell-tale, for Matt knew there was something up as soon as he looked at me. I expect to have a time with him to-morrow."

With this reflection Tom dismissed Matt Coyle from his mind, and thought of Jake and the extraordinary trick to which he had resorted to gain possession of those valises and their contents. He certainly did know more when he arrived at camp than he did when he went away in the morning, and he had so much to tell that it was almost supper time before the dinner was served. Another sleepless night, a single cup of coffee in the morning, and Tom was ready for what he fondly hoped would be his last interview with Matt Coyle.

"I am afraid you are going into danger," said Ralph, anxiously. "I shall not draw an easy breath until I see you coming back. Be

very careful, and don't let him get the slightest advantage of you."

Although Tom was in no very enviable frame of mind, he made reply to the effect that he knew just what he was going to do, for he had thought it all over while his cousins were wrapped in slumber, and then he sat down in his canoe and paddled away. His heart beat a little faster than usual when he came within sight of the place where he was to meet the squatter. The latter was not to be seen ; but as Tom backed water with his paddle, and brought his canoe to a stand-still a few feet from shore, he came out of the bushes and showed himself. Acting upon the hint Tom had given him the day before, Matt kept concealed long enough to make sure that the boy had not brought an officer with him for company. Tom was really amazed when he looked at him. Instead of the angry, half-crazy man he expected to meet, he saw before him (if there were any faith to be put in appearances) one of the jolliest, happiest mortals in existence. His face was one broad smile, and he rubbed his soiled and begrimed palms

together as if he already held between them the greenbacks which he thought Tom carried in his pocket.

"That's all gammon. He has laid a trap for me," soliloquized the boy; and, alarmed by the thought, he gave a quick, strong stroke with the double paddle that sent the canoe ten feet farther away from the beach. Matt saw and understood, and for a brief moment a savage scowl took the place of the smile he had put on for the occasion. But it cleared away as quickly as it came, and then Matt smiled again.

"Have you got it?" said he, in insinuating tones. "Have you brung the money with you?"

For an answer Tom winked his left eye.

"I'm powerful glad to hear it," said Matt. "Come ashore an' we'll soon settle this business."

"Where are the guns?"

"Back in the woods a piece. I hid 'em in the bresh, 'cause I thought that mebbe you would rather take 'em out yourself, so't you could say you found 'em without tellin' no lie about it. See?"

"That isn't according to the agreement we made yesterday," replied Tom. "I told you, as plainly as I could speak it, that you must put the guns into my canoe and I would find them there."

"Well, how be I goin' to put 'em in your canoe while you keep it twenty feet from shore?" demanded Matt. "You come up closter."

"You go and get the guns. It will be time enough for me to get in closer when I see that you have got them."

"An' it will be time enough for me to get the guns when I see that you have brung the money with you," retorted Matt, who was getting so angry that he could with difficulty control himself.

Tom laid his paddle across his knee and took a purse from his pocket, all the while keeping a sharp watch upon Matt Coyle, who had moved down the beach, inch by inch, until he was now standing in the edge of the water. Taking from the purse a small roll of bills, Tom held it up before his right eye and winked at the squatter with the other.

"There's money; now where are the guns?" said he. "I thought you were in a great hurry to have the business settled."

"I don't believe there's any fifty dollars in that there little wad of greenbacks," replied Matt. "Lemme see you count 'em out on your knee."

Instead of complying with this request, Tom shut up the purse and put it into his pocket. When Matt saw that, he could no longer restrain himself. With a sound that was more like a roar than a shout, he jumped into the water, his arms extended and his fingers spread out like the claws of some wild beast, and made a long plunge in the hope of seizing upon the gunwale of Tom's canoe. But the boy was on the alert. With one stroke of the paddle he sent the canoe far out of reach, and in a second more Matt was floundering in water that was over his head. Knowing that he could not overtake Tom by swimming, he gave vent to his fury in a volley of oaths, and went back to the beach; whereupon Tom also returned, and took up his old position.

"It seems that you are the one that is up to

tricks," said he, smiling in spite of himself at the ludicrous figure Matt Coyle presented in his dripping garments. "Now, when you get ready, I should like to have you tell me what you meant by trying to get hold of my canoe?"

"Why didn't you count out the money on your knee, like I told you, so't I could be sure you had brung the fifty dollars?" roared Matt, shaking both his clenched hands at Tom.

"Didn't I take your word for it when you told me that you had the guns? Very well; you will have to take mine when I say that I am ready to carry out my part of the agreement when you carry out yours. Show me the guns; that's all I ask of you. Look here; do you know where those guns are at this moment?"

"No, I don't," answered Matt, blurting out the truth before he thought.

"So I supposed. Well, I do. When the sheriff and his posse were coming home, after capturing those bank robbers, they found Joe Wayring's canvas canoe, and likewise the Lefever hammerless and Winchester rifle."

"Whoop!" yelled the squatter. "'Tain't so, nuther. They wasn't all hid in the same place."

"I know it," replied Tom, who knew just nothing at all about it. The canvas canoe might have been concealed in that hollow log and Tom and his cousins would have been none the wiser for it; because after the guns had been brought to light they did not look for any thing else. "You must remember that there were several men in that posse, and that they could cover a good deal of ground in an hour's time. They searched every inch of those woods, and found—"

Matt opened his mouth and gasped for breath.

"Did they—did they find—"

"No," answered Tom, who knew what Matt would have said if he could. "They did not find any money. Your Jake is the only one who knows where that is."

"I know where it is, too," said the squatter, whose lip quivered as if he had half a mind to cry about it. "But the trouble is that I can't find it."

"Then if you can't find it you don't know where it is."

"I tell you I do too. It's up there in the same woods that the canoe an' guns was hid in," cried Matt, once more speaking a little too hastily.

It was now Tom's turn to open his eyes. After a little reflection he said—

"If you think the money is in that particular part of the woods, why don't you go there and stay till you find it? Or else make Jake show you where it is."

"But Jakey won't do it. He ain't that sort of a boy."

"Then denounce him to the sheriff."

"What's that?"

"Why, expose him; tell on him. I'll bet you he will be quite willing to reveal the hiding-place of those valises when he feels an officer's grip on his collar."

"But what good will that do me? The constable who takes Jakey up will get the reward that's been offered, an' I shan't see none of it. Whoop!" shouted Matt, going off into another paroxysm of rage. "Every thing

an' every body seems to be goin' agin me this mornin'."

"Well, then," said Tom, who had the strongest of reasons for hoping that the squatter might never fall into the clutches of the law, "if I were in your place, I would have a serious talk with Jake. I'd tell him that he is sure to be arrested, sooner or later, that it is preposterous for him to think he can keep the money, and urge him to give it up and claim a portion of the reward. Some of it will have to go to the officers who found the robbers, you know. If you will do that, I will promise that Joe Wayring will not prosecute you for stealing his canoe."

"'Taint no ways likely that Joe would do a favor for you," said Matt, in a discouraged tone, "'cause you an' him don't hitch."

"I know we don't like each other any too well, but I can say a word for you, all the same. I don't know that I can do any good here, so I will go back to camp. I came down according to agreement, but I knew I shouldn't make any thing by it. You held fast to those guns too long. They have been

found, and your hundred dollars are up stump."

"If you knowed it, why did you pester me that-a-way for?" demanded the squatter, growing angry again.

"Why did you tell me you had the guns hidden a little way back in the woods when you hadn't?" asked Tom, in reply. "I saw through your game at once. Your object was to get me ashore and rob me. You would have committed a State's prison offense; but I shall not say any thing about it unless you wag your tongue too freely about me. If you do that, look out for yourself."

So saying, Tom turned his canoe about and started for camp, well satisfied with the result of his interview with the squatter. He had kept his temper in spite of strong provocation, and made Matt believe that he was in no way responsible for the loss of the guns. More than that, he had given him good honest advice, and kept up a show of friendship by making a promise he did not mean to fulfill.

"I'd like to see myself asking a favor of that Joe Wayring," said he, with a sneer. "It

would please him too well, and I wouldn't do it under any circumstances. My object was to leave Matt in good humor, if I could. Of course he was mad because he did not get the money, but not as mad as he would have been if he had succeeded in getting hold of the canoe. If he had done that, I calculated to give him such a rap over the head with my paddle that he wouldn't get over it for a month. I don't think I shall have any more trouble with him this season. Next vacation I shall steer clear of Indian Lake, and take my outing somewhere else."

Ralph Farnsworth and his brother were so very much concerned about Tom that they did not do any camp work after he went away. As soon as he was out of sight, they sat down on the bank close to the water's edge, and there they remained for four long, anxious hours before Tom came around the point and showed himself to them. When he saw them waiting for him he took off his cap and waved it in triumph over his head.

"He was awful mad, and, after trying in vain to get me out on shore so that he could take my money away from me, he rushed into the

water and made a grab at the canoe," said Tom, as he ran the bow of his little craft upon the beach. "But, after all, I didn't have as much of a time with him as I thought I should. There's your purse, Ralph. Now, if one of you will dish up a good dinner, I think I can do justice to it. I haven't had much appetite for a day or two past, but I am ravenously hungry now."

With these preliminary remarks Tom Bigden took possession of one of the hammocks and told his story from beginning to end, saying, in conclusion—

"That part of the woods seems to be a repository for Matt Coyle's stolen goods. If we had looked a little farther we might have found that money."

"I wish we had," said Loren. "Of course we should have laid no claim to a share of the reward. We would have given our portion to the guides, and perhaps gained their good will by it. Every time we go to the hotel after supplies or mail I notice that they look at us cross-eyed, as if they thought we were good fellows to let alone."

"And what makes them do it?" Tom almost shouted. "It is because Joe Wayring and his friends have gained Swan's ears, and stuffed him full of lies about us. Ugh! How I should like to see that boy taken down—clear down; as far as any body can go by land. Say," he added, after cooling off a little, "I am ready to give up the guns now. Matt Coyle may believe that Swan and his party found them at the time they found Wayring's canoe, and he may not. At any rate, I do not like to take the risk of his jumping down on our camp some dark night and finding them here. So I propose that we get rid of them this very afternoon."

The others agreeing, and a bountiful dinner having been disposed of, the three boys stepped into their canoes and set out for Indian Lake, taking the guns with them. A more astonished and delighted man than Mr. Hanson was when they walked into his office and laid the cases upon his desk Tom and his cousins had seldom seen; but the language in which he expressed his gratitude for the service they had rendered him almost made Tom wish that he had held

fast to the guns a little longer. After asking when, and where, and how they had found them, and listening with the liveliest interest to their story, Mr. Hanson said—

"That villain Coyle shall be arrested to-morrow, if I have unemployed guides enough in my pay to find him. I should have been after him two weeks ago, if it hadn't been for these guns; and now that I've got them I shall not fool with him a day longer. You have fairly earned the reward," he added, opening his money drawer, "and I am authorized—"

"We don't need money, Mr. Hanson, and we'll not touch a cent of it," interrupted Ralph. "Give it to the guides who lost their situations when the guns were stolen."

"Swan and Bob Martin?" said Mr. Hanson. "Well, they are deserving men, and, although they did not lose their situations on account of the loss of the guns, because they were working for me and not for the sportsmen with whom they went into the woods, still I know they would be glad to have the money. I'll hand it to them, if you say so, and tell them I do it at your request."

"Thank you," answered Ralph. "We shall be much obliged.

"Hold on a minute," said Mr. Hanson, as the boys turned away from the desk. "The gentlemen who own these guns are not the only ones benefited by your lucky find. You have saved me the loss of a good deal of patronage, and I wish to make you some return for it. Whenever you want any supplies, go to the store-house and get them. They shan't cost you a cent."

Thanking the landlord for his liberality, Tom and his companions left the hotel and walked slowly throngh the grounds toward the beach.

"The place is almost deserted," observed Tom. "There are not half as many guests here as there were the first time we saw the Sportsman's Home."

"Probably they have gone into the woods," said Loren.

"Then how does it come that there are so many guides lying around doing nothing?" asked Tom. "I don't believe there are many guests in the woods. They have gone home,

or to other fishing grounds where their camps will not be robbed the minute they turn their backs. Matt said he would ruinate the hotels, if they didn't give him work, and he seems in a fair way to do it."

"Say," whispered Ralph. "I didn't like what Hanson said about having Matt Coyle arrested."

Tom was about to answer that he didn't like it either, when he heard footsteps behind him and a voice calling out: "Just another word before you go, boys," and upon turning around he saw Mr. Hanson in pursuit.

"I forgot one thing," said he, when he came up. "Can you make it convenient to come here day after to-morrow morning? By that time we'll have Matt hard and fast, most likely. The sheriff says he will have to take him to Irvington, that being the nearest place at which we can have him bound over to appear before the circuit court. I can prove by Rube Royall, the watchman at the hatchery, that Matt acknowledged stealing and concealing the guns, and I shall need you to testify

to the finding of them. You will be around, won't you?"

The boys said they would, but their voices were almost inaudible, and the faces they turned toward one another when Mr. Hanson had left them were very white indeed.

"Now we *are* in a scrape," said Loren, who was the first to break the silence. "Tom Bigden, that fellow will tell all he knows about you just so sure as you get up in court to bear witness against him. You told him that the guides found and returned the guns."

"So I did," groaned Tom. "So I did; but he won't be long in finding out that I lied to him, will he? What shall I do? What can I do? There's one thing about it," added Tom, who, although badly frightened, tried to put a bold face on the matter. "Matt Coyle has not yet been arrested, and I've got so much at stake that I don't want him to be. I shall seek another interview with him in the morning, and, if I can bring it about, I will tell him just what Hanson said about him. It is all that Joe Wayring's fault. If he had treated us decently I wouldn't have been in this scrape.

I'll do that boy some injury the first good chance I get."

On their way to camp the boys kept within talking distance of one another and discussed the situation. Loren was of opinion that his cousin Tom had better draw a bee-line for Mount Airy bright and early the next morning; but Tom and Ralph agreed in saying that that would be the very worst thing that could be done under the circumstances. Mr. Hanson had plainly told them that he would need them for witnesses, and if Tom was foolish enough to run away he had better make a long run while he was about it and get out of the State, or the authorities would catch him sure.

"I shall not run an inch. I've got to stay and face it down," said Tom, quietly; and his cousins knew, by the way the words came out, that he had decided upon his course. "There were no witnesses present when I told Matt to steal Joe Wayring's canoe, and the matter will simply resolve itself into a question of veracity; and when it comes to that I think my word will have about as much weight as a tramp's. All the same, I don't

want Matt arrested if it can possibly be avoided."

Tom slept the sleep of the exhausted that night, and at seven o'clock the next morning shoved his canoe awav from the beach and pulled toward tne hatchery.

CHAPTER XI.

SAM ON THE TRAIL.

"THERE, now," soliloquized Jake Coyle, as he wended his way through the gloomy woods after concealing the canvas canoe and the two valises he had fished up from the bottom of the lake. "I'm a rich man, an' nobody but me knows the first thing about it. As soon as it gets daylight, I'll come back an' hide the guns an' the money an' the canoe all together, in a better place, so't if pap gets a hint of what is goin' on, an' I have to dig out from home in the middle of the night, I shall know right where to find 'em without runnin' through the woods to hunt 'em up. Now, as soon as I can get Rube to buy me some shoes an' clothes an' powder an' lead, I'll go back to some of them swamps that I've heared pap tell about, an' trap on my own

hook. I'll sell my skins in New London, 'cause nobody don't know me there. I'll be 'rested if I stay around where pap is."

In blissful ignorance of the fact that his father, following close behind him, had seen almost every move he made that night, Jake lumbered on through the darkness, and at last found himself on the "carry" that ran close by the door of Rube Royall's humble abode. Cautiously approaching the door, Jake pushed it open and looked in. He could see nothing, for the fire on the hearth had gone out, and the interior of the cabin was pitch dark. But he heard the heavy breathing of the sleepers, and, believing that his father was among them, he entered on tiptoe, stretched himself out on one of the beds beside his slumbering brother, and drew a long breath of relief. The night had been full of excitement, and the day was destined to bring more.

About eight o'clock the next morning, after breakfast had been eaten and Rube had gone to sleep, the old woman and her boys gathered in the wood yard in front of the house, and talked and wondered at the prolonged absence

of the head of the family. Jake appeared to be very much concerned about him.

"Say, mam, when did you see him last?" he anxiously inquired.

"Not sence you left hum last night," was the reply. "I didn't think nothin' of your bein' gone, 'cause I thought mebbe you had went after more grub; but I don't see what took the ole man away so permiscus. I couldn't make head or tail of the way he went snoopin' around yisterday, first in the house, then in the woods, an' the next thing you knowed you didn't know where he was. 'Taint like him to be gone all night in this way. Why, Jakey, what makes your face so white?"

"Dunno; less'n it's 'cause I'm afeared the constables have got a hold of him," answered the boy.

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed the old woman. "You needn't——"

She was going to say something else but didn't have time. Just then hasty steps sounded on the hard path, and the three looked up to see the missing man approaching at a rapid run. He was angry about some-

thing, Jake could see that with half an eye, and frightened as well.

"Git outen here!" said Matt, as soon as he could make himself heard. "Scatter! They're comin'!"

"Who's comin'?" asked the old woman, who was the only one who could speak.

"Swan, an' all the rest of them fellers that went out to 'rest them robbers."

"Did they ketch 'em?"

"Now jest listen at you! Do you reckon I stopped to talk to 'em, dog-gone ye? I dug out soon as I heard 'em comin' through the woods."

"Where was they?"

"Up there by the cove where our camp was burned, an' headin' straight for it."

"The cove?" gasped Jake.

"Yes, the cove, you ongrateful scamp, an' goin' as straight t'wards it as they could go. They're bound to nose out something there," said Matt, remembering that he must have made a good many wide and plain trails while he was roaming around looking for Jake's treasure, "an' if they find them two grip-sacks

that you left there last night I wouldn't be in them ragged clothes of your'n, Jakey, for no money in this broad world. You are a purty chap to go an' find six thousand dollars an' hide it from your pap, I do think. Now scatter out an' make for that there cove as quick as it is safe. Then we'll be on their trail, 'stead of havin' them on our'n. Jakey, stay where I can put my hands on you when I want you."

These words recalled the boy's senses and brought his power of action back to him. He did not know which he stood the most in fear of—his father's wrath, the probable loss of his money, or the sheriff and his posse; but he *did* know that he was not safe where he was, so he caught up his rifle, which rested against a log close at hand, and took to his heels. Sam was frightened, too, but not to the same degree that Matt and Jake were, because he was not as guilty. He kept his wits about him, and proved by his subsequent movements that he could act as promptly and intelligently in a crisis as his brother could. When Jake disappeared, and Matt and his wife ran into the

cabin to collect the few articles of value they possessed, previous to seeking safety in flight, Sam stood and communed thus with himself:

"Beats the world, an' I don't begin to see through it; but how did that Jake of our'n get them six thousand dollars that was stole outen the Irvin'ton bank? He's got 'em, 'cause pap said so; an' they're hid somewheres near the place where our old camp used to be. Wonder if Jakey is goin' there now? I reckon I'd best keep an eye on him an' find out. Why didn't he go halvers with the rest of us, like he'd oughter done? If I can get my hands on that money he won't never see it agin, I tell you."

Jake Coyle's brain was in such a whirl that he never once thought to look behind him as he hurried through the woods toward the head of the outlet; and even if he had he might not have seen Sam, who was a short distance in his rear and keeping him constantly in sight; for Sam took pains to cover himself with every tree and bush that came in his way. Once he came near being caught; for Jake, recalling his angry sire's parting words, and apprehensive

of being followed, suddenly threw himself behind a log and watched the trail over which he had just passed. But, fortunately for Sam, he saw the movement, rapid as it was, and stopped in time to escape detection. A less skillful woodsman would have lost Jake then and there, or else he would have run upon him before he knew it.

After spending a quarter of an hour in patient waiting Jake must have become satisfied that his fears of pursuit were groundless, for he jumped up and again took to his heels. He kept on past the outlet, skirted the shore of the lake until he came within a short distance of the place where Tom Bigden and the squatter held their consultations, and there he took to the woods and struck a straight course for the cove, Sam following close behind.

It was ten miles to the cove by land, and all the way through timber that had never echoed to the woodman's ax. It was a distance that few city-bred boys could have covered at a trot, but it was nothing to the squatter's sons, who would have done it any

day for a dollar. Twice while on the way did Jake try his "dropping" dodge, but Sam was too sharp to be caught. The last time he tried it was when he was within a stone's throw of the cove; and then he dived into a thicket, and waited and watched for half an hour before he made a move. Sam, patient and tireless as an Indian, did not move, either, until he saw Jake come out of the thicket and make his way toward the log in which the stolen guns were concealed. He saw him take out the cases, one after the other, and hide them in another log nearer the cove; and while he was wondering what his brother's object could be in doing that the sound of voices in conversation came from the direction of the creek, whereupon Jake fled with the greatest precipitation, hardly daring to stop long enough to cover the end of the log with a bush which he cut with a knife. He threw himself behind the first fallen tree he came to, and looked cautiously over it to see what was going to happen.

Jake thought, and so did Sam, that the voices belonged to the members of the sheriff's

posse, who were still loitering about in the vicinity of the cove to see what else they could find there; consequently their surprise was great when they saw Ralph Farnsworth step out of the evergreens with his gun on his shoulder. He stopped and looked around when he stumbled over the bush that concealed the end of the log, stooped over for a minute, and when he straightened up again he held in his hands the Victoria case in which reposed the Lefever hammerless. Then it was that Ralph sent up those excited calls to attract the attention of his companions, who presently joined him.

If Jake and Sam had been working in harmony, they never would have remained inactive in their places of concealment and let Tom and his cousins carry off those guns. Jake, especially, was hopping mad. He got upon his knees, exposing so much of his ragged clothing above the log that he certainly would have been seen if Tom and the rest had glanced in his direction, and shook his fists over his head.

"They're thieves theirselves if they take

them guns away," muttered Jake, between his clenched teeth. "I was goin' to give 'em to Rube, an' tell him to buy me some shoes an' clothes outen my shar' of the reward; but now I can't have 'em. I wisht they would go off; for if they tech them grip-sacks—"

Jake finished the sentence by pushing up his sleeves and looking around for a club. The money was hidden but a short distance from that very log, and if Tom and his cousins had found it Jake would have rushed out and fought them single-handed before he would have given up his claim to it. But things did not come to that pass. Ralph had come upon the guns by the merest accident, and he and his friends did not think to search for any other stolen property. They took the guns away with them, and the minute they were out of sight Jake began to bestir himself. He came out on his hands and knees, crawled past the empty log, and disappeared among the bushes on the other side of it. While Sam was trying to decide whether or not it would be quite safe to follow him, Jake glided into view again, holding a valise under each arm.

"There they are! Sure's you're born, there they are!" cried Sam, in great excitement; and if he had uttered the words a little louder Jake would have heard him. "Now, all I've got to do is to keep my eyes on them things an' never lose track of 'em agin."

And Sam didn't lose track of them, either, although Jake spent nearly an hour in hunting up a safe hiding-place for them. He ran swiftly from point to point, closely scrutinizing every log and thicket he came to and stopping now and then to listen, and Sam followed him wherever he went and saw all he did. At last Jake found a place to suit him. A gigantic poplar had been overturned by the wind, and in falling had pulled up a good portion of the earth in which its far-reaching roots were embedded, thus forming a cavity so deep and wide that Rube Royall's cabin could have been buried in it, chimney and all. Into this cavity Jake recklessly plunged, and when he came out again fifteen minutes later his arms were empty. He had left the valises behind.

"An' he won't never see 'em agin, nuther,"

said Sam, gleefully. "They're mine now, an' so is the money that's into 'em."

During the long hours he had spent in dogging his brother's steps, Sam Coyle had not been so highly excited as he was at this moment. When Jake disappeared, apparently holding a direct course for Rube's cabin, Sam did not move. Impatient as he was to see the color of that money, he was too wary to imperil his chances by doing any thing hasty.

"I can stay right yer till I get so hungry I can't stay no longer," was his mental reflection; "but Jake's got to show up purty soon, 'cause if he don't, him an' pap'll have a furse. He told Jake, pap did, that he wanted him to stay where he could get his hands onto him; an' when pap talks that-a-way, he means business. So I reckon Jake will go a lumberin' towards hum till he meets pap, an' then he'll pertend that he's been a-lookin for him."

When this thought passed through Sam's mind it occurred to him that he had better not remain too long inactive, for this might be the last opportunity he would ever have to re-

move the money from Jake's hiding-place to another of his own selection; so, after half an hour's waiting, Sam set himself in motion. He did not get upon his feet, nor did he go directly toward the fallen poplar. He crawled along on his stomach and made a wide detour, so as to approach the cavity on the side opposite to that on which Jake had entered and left it. Of course this took him a long time, but he made up for it by the readiness with which he found the money when he arrived at the end of his toilsome journey. A little prodding among the leaves at the foot of the poplar brought the valises to light, and in ten minutes more they were hidden in another place where Jake, when he discovered his loss, would never think of looking for them. They were not shoved into a hollow log nor covered up in the leaves. They were placed high among the thick branches of an evergreen and tied fast there, so that the wind would not shake them out.

"There," said Sam, after he had made a circuit of the tree and viewed it from all sides. "Nobody can't find 'em now. They are mine,

sure. I reckon I'd best go to the cove an' set down, 'cause pap'll be along directly."

Sam had barely time to reach the cove and compose himself when Matt put in an appearance. His first words explained why he had been so long in getting there, and quieted the fear that suddenly sprang up in Sam's mind, that his father had been following him as he himself had followed Jake.

"Haven't I said all along that Rube wasn't by no means the friend to us that he pertends to be?" said the squatter, fiercely. "I didn't run as fur into the bresh as you boys an' the ole woman did, but got behind a log where I could see every thing that was done at the shanty. I seen the sheriff's men when they come outen the woods an' surrounded the house, an' purty quick along come Swan, watchin' over the two robbers an' carryin' a pistol in one hand an' Jake's canvas canoe in the other. They waked Rube up, an' he stood in the door an' talked to 'em as friendly as you please. He showed 'em where we hid the two skiffs we stole from Swan's party on the day they burned our camp at this here cove;

an' then one of the robbers an' sheriff an' five or six guides an' constables got into 'em an' pulled up to that snag opposite Haskinses' landin', in the hope of findin' them six thousand dollars. But they had their trouble for their pains. Jakey brought 'em up with your mam's clothes-line last night, an' hid 'em somewheres around here. Seen any thing of Jake since you been here?"

"Nary thing," replied Sam. "I was a wonderin' why he didn't come. You told him to stay where you could get your hands onto him."

"So I did, an' this is the way he minds his pap, the ongrateful scamp. I wanted him to meet me here an' show me where that money is. He needn't think he's goin' to keep it all, even if he did capsize them robbers. I'm the one who oughter have the care of it, bein' as I'm the head man of the house. Ain't that so, Sammy?"

"Course it is. If I'd found it, I would have gone halvers with you. How do you know Jake brung it up here an' hid it?"

"'Cause I follered him. That's what kept

me out all night. I was lookin' for it when I heard Swan an' the rest of the guides comin'. I wisht Jakey would hurry up an' come."

"Say, pap," exclaimed Sam. "Let's me an' you hunt for the money all by ourselves. If we find it, we'll hold fast to it an' never give Jake a cent to pay him for bein' so stingy."

"I'd like mighty well if we could do it," answered Matt. "But I looked high an' low for it all last night, an' not a thing that was shaped like a grip-sack could I find. I'm jest done out with tiredness. You look for it, Sammy, an' I'll lay down here an' take a little sleep."

Without waiting to hear whether or not this proposition was agreeable to Sam, the squatter stretched his heavy frame upon the leaves, pulled his remnant of a hat over his face and prepared for rest. Sam looked curiously at him for a moment, then arose to his feet and disappeared. He went straight to the log behind which Jake had concealed himself when alarmed by Ralph Farnsworth's approach, scraped a few leaves together for a

bed, and laid himself down upon it. But before he went to sleep he made up his mind that he would not say a word to his father about the loss of the guns; it would hardly be safe. Sam knew that his father expected to make some money out of those guns, and when he found that he could not do it, he would be apt to lose his temper and try to take satisfaction out of somebody.

"That would be me," soliloquized Sam, "'cause I am the nighest to his hand. I guess I'd best pertend that I don't know nothin' about them guns. Let pap find out for himself that they are gone, an' then he'll think that Swan found 'em when he found the canoe."

Having come to this decision Sam settled himself for a comfortable nap, from which he was aroused an hour before dark by his father's stentorian voice. He got upon his feet and brushed the leaves from his clothing before he answered.

"Well, what's the use of yellin' that-a-way an' tellin' Swan an' all the rest of the guides where you be?" shouted Sam. "Here I am."

"Have you found the money?" asked Matt, in lower tones.

"Course not. If I had, I should 'a' waked you up. 'Tain't in these here woods, pap, 'cause if there's an inch of 'em that I ain't peeped into sence you've been asleep I don't know where it is."

"I tell you it is hid in these woods too," said the squatter, angrily. "Didn't I foller Jake up here an' hang around while he was hidin' the grip-sacks an' the canoe?"

"Well, then was the time that you oughter jumped out an' took it away from him," said Sam. "I'll bet you the guides found it same's they did the canoe."

"Now, jest listen at you! Wasn't I hid in plain sight of them when they was ferried acrost the outlet at the hatchery, an' didn't I take pains to see that they didn't have no grip-sacks with 'em? If I had took it away from him by force he would have got mad an' went an' told on me; don't you see? I knowed that the only chance I had was to steal the money unbeknownst to Jakey, an' make him think the guides got it. Looked in every place

without findin' it, did you? Well, there's one thing about it. If Jakey don't come up here tomorrer an' give me them six thousand dollars, I'll tell on him, an' he shan't live in my family no longer. It's most dark, Sammy, an' time for me an' you to be a-lumberin'."

"Where to?" inquired Sam.

"Why, to Rube's, in course. We ain't got no place else to go, have we?"

"But what's the sense in goin' there when you know Rube ain't friendly to you?"

"Me an' your mam talked it all over, an' we know jest what we're goin' to do," replied the squatter. "We've got to take to the woods now, an' live like we done before Rube opened his shanty to us. We're in danger long's we stay there, an' this night will be the last one we shall ever spend under his roof. But we've got to have some furnitur' to put into our shanty after we get it built, an' we'll try to get it of Rube. I shall make enough outen them guns to buy the furnitur', an' then if Jake will come to his senses an' give me the handlin' of that money we'll live like fightin' fowls; won't we, Sammy?"

Aloud Sam said he thought they would; but to himself he said it would be a long time before his father would have the handling of that money. He intended to keep every dollar of it, although, for the life of him, he could not make up his mind what he would do with it.

It was dark long before Sam and his father reached the cabin, and the only member of the family they found there was the old woman, Rube being at the hatchery on watch, and Jake having failed to "show up." That made Matt furious.

"Looks as if he meant to keep outen our way, find that money when he gets a good ready, an' take himself off," exclaimed the squatter. "It won't work, that plan won't. I ain't fooled the sheriff an' all his constables for years an' years to let myself be beat by one of my own boys at last, I bet you. We'll stay here to-night, 'cause we ain't nowhere else to go, an' to-morrer we'll buy some bed-furnitur' an' cookin'-dishes of Rube, an' go to hidin' in the woods agin. If Jakey wants to live with us, he'd best bring them six thousand dollars with him when he comes hum."

The squatter went to sleep fully expecting to find the missing boy occupying his shake-down when he awoke in the morning; but he was disappointed. His absence alarmed Matt, who began to fear that Jake had fallen into the hands of the constables; but a few cautious questions propounded to Rube, when the latter came to breakfast, set his fears on that score at rest.

"No; the sheriff didn't ketch Jakey," said the watchman, "but he was clost after him, 'cause he knowed that Jakey was the chap who took the robbers over the lake and spilled the grip-sacks into the water. How did the sheriff find that out? The robbers told him, an' described Jake an' his canoe so well that all the guides knew in a minute who they would have to arrest. Where did Jake hide the money after he fished it outen the lake?"

"How do you 'spose I know!" growled Matt.

"Who should know if you don't?" replied Rube. "I seen you follerin' him in a skiff."

"Well," said Matt, who saw it would be useless for him to deny it, "I don't know

where he put the money, an' I'm mighty sorry for it. Seen any thing of Jake lately?"

"No, I ain't, an' what's more I don't expect to see him again very soon, either. He'll keep clear of me, for he knows that if I could find him it would be my bounden dooty to take him up an' lay claim to part of the six hundred dollars reward. All you've got to do is to make yourselves comfortable here in my house—"

"Well, we ain't goin' to make ourselves comfortable in your house no longer," interrupted Matt. "We're thinkin' of takin' to the woods."

"What for?"

"'Cause we don't think it safe here so nigh the place the constables come every time they go into the woods. We'd feel better if we was a piece furder off from 'em."

Rube carelessly inquired where his guest thought of going; but Matt did not give him any satisfaction on that point. He thought he might as well send word to the sheriff and be done with it. Then he broached the subject of furniture, and found that, although

Rube was quite willing to sell what he did not need for his own use, he had one hard condition to impose. Cash up and no trust had been his motto through life, and he was too old to depart from it now. He wanted to see the color of Matt's money before he let a single thing go.

"That's the way I'm workin' it to keep him here till I can find them guns," thought the watchman, as he threw himself upon his shake-down. "Matt ain't got ten cents to his name; an' where's he goin' to get it? Winter's comin' on, an' it would be the death of him an' all his family to take to the woods without something to wrap themselves up in of nights, an' so I reckon they'll stay here with me for a while longer. But I don't know what to think about Jakey."

Rube Royall was not the only one who did not know what to think of him.

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT VARIOUS THINGS.

WHEN the watchman took possession of his shake-down Matt Coyle and his family, following their usual custom, adjourned to the open air and sat on the logs in the wood-yard, smoking their pipes, talking over their troubles, and consulting as to the means they ought to employ to "get even" with the guides and other well-to-do people who were so relentlessly persecuting them. On this particular morning they talked about Jake and his unaccountable absence; that is, Matt and his wife did the talking, and Sam sat and listened, all the while looking as innocent as though he had never heard of the Irvington bank robbery, or felt the weight of the two valises that contained the six thousand stolen dollars. His brother Jake would have betrayed himself a dozen times in as many

minutes; but Sam did nothing to arouse suspicion against him. Matt at last gave it as his opinion that Jake intended to run away with the money, and repeated what he had said the night before—that a man who had spent years of his life in dodging constables was not to be beaten by one of his own boys. Then he filled a fresh pipe and strolled off toward the hatchery. He thought that was the safest place for him, for if the sheriff came back after Jake Matt would see him when he signaled for a boat to take him across the outlet, and have plenty of time to run to the cabin and warn his family.

Of course the squatter did not show himself openly. He took up a position from which he could see every thing that went on about the hatchery, and smoked several pipes while he waited for something to "turn up." If the sheriff was looking for Jake, he certainly did not come near the outlet; but somebody else did. It was Tom Bigden. Matt, of course, was not aware that the boy had come there seeking an interview with him; but when he saw him loitering about the hatchery with

no apparent object an idea suddenly popped into the squatter's head.

"I jest know that Bigden boy didn't tell me the truth when he said that him an' his cousins was strapped for money, an' that they would have to go to Mount Airy before they could buy them guns of me," soliloquized Matt. "I'll watch my chance to ketch him while he is on his way to camp, an' tell him that I can't wait no ten days for my money. I must have it to onct, 'cause I want to buy that furnitur' of Rube."

While he was talking to himself in this way Matt got up and started for the lake; and, as we have seen, he got there in time to intercept Tom Bigden. So far as Matt was concerned, the interview was a most unsatisfactory one. Tom was so very haughty and independent that the squatter knew, before he had exchanged half a dozen words with him, that there was "something wrong somewheres."

When Tom paddled away, after promising to meet Matt the next morning at seven o'clock, he left the man revolving some deep

problems in his mind. Matt never once suspected that Tom had found the guns, but he did fear that he had found the valises that contained the bank's money, and the thought was enough to drive him almost frantic. As soon as Tom was out of sight he caught up his rifle and posted off to the cabin to see if Jake had been there during his absence; but neither Sam nor the old woman could tell any thing about him.

"I'd give every thing I've got in the world if I could get my hand on that boy's collar, for jest one minute," cried Matt, as he stormed about the wood-yard shaking his fists in the air. "He kalkerlates to ruinate the whole of us by runnin' off with them six thousand. I'll tell you what we'll do, ole woman. To-morrer mornin' at seven o'clock I shall have money enough to buy the furnitur' we need, an' soon's we get it we'll go up to the cove an' camp there agin. Jake hid that money somewheres around there, an' if he don't take it away to-day he won't never get it, for we shall be there to stop him. Don't you reckon that's the best thing we can do?"

Too highly excited to remain long in one place, Matt did not stop to hear his wife's answer, but posted off to the cove after the guns. He might never see a cent of the six thousand dollars, he told himself, but the guns he was sure of.

"That Bigden boy didn't say, in so many words, that he had fifty dollars to pay for them, but he winked, an' that's as good an answer as I want. He wouldn't dare fool me, knowin' as he does that I can have him 'rested any time I feel like it. Here is where we left 'em," said Matt, stooping down in front of the log in which he and his boys had concealed the property he wanted to find. "But I do think in my soul that somebody has been here. The chunks is all scattered around an'—yes, sir; the guns is gone."

Matt dropped upon his hands and knees and peered into the hollow, which he saw at a glance was empty. Then he seated himself upon the log and took his pipe from his pocket. He did not whoop and yell, as he usually did when things went wrong with him, for this new misfortune fairly stunned him.

His knowledge of the English language was so limited that he could not do justice to his feelings; but by the time he had smoked his pipe out he had made up his mind what he would do.

"In course that Bigden boy will have the fifty dollars in his pocket when he comes after the guns to-morrer," said he. "So all I've got to do is to get him ashore an' take it away from him. I reckon I've lost them six thousand, but I ain't goin' to be cheated on all sides, I bet you. Then if he blabs, I'll tell about his bein' in ca-hoots with me when I stole Joe Wayring's canvas canoe. I reckon that's the best thing I can do."

I have already told you how hard Matt tried to carry out this programme when he met Tom Bigden on the following morning and how signally he failed. Tom could not be induced to approach very close to the beach, and was so wide-awake and so quick with his paddle that Matt could not seize his canoe. The squatter's proverbial luck seemed to have forsaken him at last. He was being worsted at every point.

I pass over the next few days, during which little occurred that was worthy of note. Jake Coyle kept aloof from his kindred, who had not the faintest idea where he was or how he lived. Matt and the rest of his family again established their camp at the cove, and they did not go there a single day too soon; for when it became known among the guides that the stolen guns had been found and given into Mr. Hanson's keeping a dozen of them plunged into the woods, intent on earning the hundred dollars that had been offered for the squatter's apprehension, and ridding the country of a dangerous man at the same time. Tom Bigden and his cousins fished a little and lounged in their hammocks a good deal, and, having had time to become thoroughly disgusted with camp life, were talking seriously of going home.

As bad luck would have it, the three boys went up to the Sportsman's Home after their mail on the same day that Mr. Swan returned from his trip to Mount Airy. They heard him say that he had restored the canvas canoe to his owner, that Joe Wayring was all ready to

pay another visit to Indian Lake, and that he and his two chums might be expected to arrive at any hour. Ralph and his brother did not pay much attention to this, for they didn't like Joe well enough to be interested in his movements; but Tom paid a good deal of attention to it. He spent an hour or two the next morning in loafing about the hatchery, and another hour on the beach waiting for Matt Coyle. That was the time he was seen by a couple of guides and their employers, who were camping on the opposite side of the Lake, and who had a good deal to say about the incident when they went back to their hotel. They saw Matt plainly when he came out of the bushes and accosted Tom, and if they had been near enough they might have overheard the following conversation:

"I seen you hangin' around the hatchery, an' thought that mebbe you had something to say to me; so I come up yer," said Matt, who, for some reason, was in exceedingly good humor.

"You have been a long time coming," was Tom's reply. "I began to get tired of waiting

and was about to start for camp. What has come over you all of a sudden? You are not quite as ugly as you were the last time I saw you."

"An' you ain't quite so skittish, nuther," retorted Matt. "I couldn't get you to come ashore last time you was here."

"Of course not. You meant to rob me, and I knew it. What good fortune has befallen you now?"

"You may well ask that," replied the squatter, sitting down on the log and producing his never failing pipe. "I did think one spell that luck was agin me, but now I know it ain't. The reason I kept you waitin' so long for me was 'cause I run foul of Jake as I was comin' here."

As soon as Tom had time to recover from the surprise that these words occasioned, he told himself that he wouldn't be in Jake's place for any money.

"I ain't sot eyes on that there boy for better'n a week, an' you can't begin to think how tickled I was to see him," continued Matt. "He's been livin' tol'able hard since he's been

away from hum, an' I reckon it'll do him good to get a jolly tuck-out onct more."

The squatter might have added that he and his family had also lived tolerable hard during Jake's absence. They had put themselves on half rations, trying to make their bacon and potatoes last as long as possible, for when their larder was empty they did not know where the next supply was coming from.

"What did you do to Jake when you ran foul of him?" inquired Tom.

"What did I do to him? Why should I want to do any thing to him, seein' that he has come hum to show me where them six thousand is hid? I jest tied him hard an' fast, so't I could easy find him agin, an' left him in the bresh behind Rube's cabin with the ole woman watchin' over him to see that he don't get loose," replied Matt, with a grin. "Did you want to say any thing to me?"

"I thought it might interest you to know that your friend Joe Wayring is coming back to Indian Lake, and that he will probably bring Jake's canoe with him," answered Tom.

"Is *that* all?" exclaimed Matt, knocking

the ashes from his pipe and glaring fiercely at the boy. "Have you made me tramp three or four miles through the woods jest to tell me that? I don't care for Joe Wayring an' his ole boat now. They can go where they please an' do what they have a mind to, so long's they keep clear of me. I wisht I hadn't come. Jakey an' me might have been most up to the cove where the money is hid by this time."

Seeing that Matt was disposed to get angry at him for the time he had wasted and the long tramp he had taken for nothing, Tom stepped into his canoe and shoved off, while the squatter disappeared in the woods, grumbling as he went. He took the shortest course for the outlet, and in the thickest part of the woods, a short distance in the rear of the watchman's cabin, found his wife keeping guard over the helpless Jake, who was so tightly wrapped in ropes that he could scarcely move a finger. The woman had accompanied Matt to the hatchery with the intention of begging a few eatables of Rube; but, finding him fast asleep, she helped herself to every thing she could find in the house, without taking the trouble to

awaken him. When Matt came suddenly upon Jake in the woods and made a prisoner of him before he had time to think twice, his mother was on hand to stand sentry over him.

"That Bigden boy made me go miles outen my way an' lose two or three hours besides, jest 'cause he wanted to tell me that Joe Wayring is comin' back to Injun Lake directly," said the squatter, in response to his wife's inquiring look. "Jest as if I cared for him when there's six thousand dollars waitin' for me. Now, Jakey, what brung you to the hatchery? I ain't had a chance to ask you before."

"I come to git some grub, for I'm nigh starved to death," said Jake, and his pinched face and sunken eyes bore testimony to the truth of his words. "I allowed to take one of the skiffs that we stole from Swan and his crowd, an' go up to the lake an' rob another suller."

"Well, you wouldn't have found the skiffs, even if I hadn't collared you before you knowed I was within a mile of you," answered Matt. "Rube told the guides where we hid 'em, an' they took 'em off the same day they

carried away your canvas canoe. But I'm glad you come after one of 'em, for it brung you plump into the arms of your pap, who has been waitin' for more'n a week for you to came an' show him where you hid them six thousand dollars. Be you ready to do it now, Jakey?"

"I allers kalkerlated to do it," replied Jake. "Sure hope to die, I did."

"I'm glad to hear it; but I'd been gladder if you had brung the money to me the minute you found it. Untie his feet, ole woman, an' we'll go back to camp."

"An' my hands, too," added Jake.

"You don't need your hands to walk with," said Matt.

"But I need 'em to keep the bresh from hittin' me in the face while we are goin' through the woods, don't I?"

"Oh, shucks! The lickin' you'll get from the bresh won't be a patchin' to the one you'll get from me if we don't find them grip-sacks tol'able easy," replied Matt in significant tones. "Now, you go on ahead, takin' the shortest cut, an' me an' yer mam'll foller."

Having helped the boy to his feet, Matt waved his hand toward the cove, as if he were urging a hound to take up a trail, and Jake staggered off. I say staggered, because he was too weak to move with his usual springy step. When his strength failed through long fasting, his courage also left him, and Jake had at last determined that if he could secure one of the skiffs he would take the money to Indian Lake and give it up to the sheriff. He was afraid to surrender it to his father, because he knew that Matt would thrash him for not giving it up before. His father came upon him suddenly while he was making his way around the hatchery toward the place where the skiffs had been concealed, and Jake, too weak to run and too spiritless to resist, was easily made captive. He was very hungry, and repeatedly begged his father to untie his hands and give him a slice off the loaf of bread that he could see in the bundle the old woman carried on her arm ; but Matt would not listen to him.

"Show us the money first, Jakey," was his invariable reply, "an' then you shall have all you want. But not a bite do you get till I feel

the heft of them grip-sacks. 'Tain't likely that I'll go outen my way to please a ongrateful scamp of a boy who finds six thousand dollars an' hides it from his pap."

The long ten-mile tramp through the woods exhausted the last particle of Jake Coyle's strength, and when he led his father to the brink of the cavity at the foot of the poplar he wilted like a blade of grass that had been struck by the frost.

"Is it in there?" cried Matt, excitedly.

"Yes; clear down to the bottom, clost up under the roots of the tree," said Jake, faintly. "Now, mam, untie my hands an' give me a hunk of that bread, can't ye?"

The woman, who was not quite so heartless as her husband, thought she might safely comply with the request. Jake could not have got up a trot to save his life; but he had strength enough to eat, and the way Rube's bread and cold fried bacon disappeared before his attacks was astonishing. He ate until his mother called a halt and reminded him that if he kept on there wouldn't be anything left over for supper.

Meanwhile Matt was working industriously, almost frantically, expecting every moment that the stick with which he was making the leaves fly in all directions would strike one of the valises. In a very short space of time the ground about the roots of the tree was as bare as the back of his hand, but nothing was to be seen of the money. Having taken the sharp edge off his appetite, Jake began showing some interest in the proceedings, and the longer his father worked, the wider his eyes opened.

"You don't seem to throw out nothing, pap," said he, at last.

"I know I don't," answered Matt. "But you will seem to feel something if I don't find it directly, for I'll lick ye good fashion."

"As sure's you live an' breathe, pap, I hid it there, clost under the roots of that tree," said Jake, who was almost overwhelmed with astonishment. "I can't for the life of me think what's went with it."

"Mebbe you can after you've had a hickory laid over your back a few times," replied Matt. "I've heard tell that a good lickin' goes a long ways in stirrin' up a boy's ideas."

Just then a new actor appeared upon the scene. It was Sam Coyle, who had been left in camp to watch over things during the absence of his father and mother. While dozing over the fire he heard and recognized his father's voice, and came out to see what he was doing. He took care to pass the tree in which the valises were hidden, and to look among the branches to make sure that they were still there.

"Hallo, Jakey," said he, in a surprised tone. "Where did you drop down from? What be you lookin' for, pap?"

"Jakey allowed that he come hum to show me where them six thousand was hid; but it's my idee that he come a purpose to get his jacket dusted, 'cause the money ain't here," replied Matt. "Jakey oughter know better than to try to fool his pap that a-way."

"I ain't tryin' to fool you," protested Jake. "I put the grip-sacks into that hole, an' I don't see where they be now."

"If he is tryin' to make a fule of his pap, he deserves a lickin'," continued Matt, paying no sort of attention to Jake. "An' if he hid the money here, an' somebody come along

an' found it, he had oughter have a lickin' for that, too, to pay him for not givin' it up to me the minute he got it."

As the squatter said this he threw down the stick with which he had been turning over the leaves, climbed out of the hole and began looking for a switch. Jake saw that things were getting serious, and so did Sam. It is doubtful if the latter would have revealed the hiding-place of the money to save his brother from punishment, but still he did not want to see him whipped.

"Look a here, pap," said Jake, desperately. "I told you honest when I said I put the grip-sacks at the root of that there tree. You can pound me if you want to, but it'll be wuss for you if you do."

There was something in the tone of his voice that made Matt pause and look at him. "What do you reckon you're goin' to do?" said he.

"In the first place, I shan't steal no grub to feed a pap who pounds me for jest nothin'," replied the boy.

"I ain't a-goin' to pound you for nothin'.

I'm goin' to pay you for not givin' me the money."

"An' in the next place I shan't stay with you no longer," continued Jake. "I'll go down to one of them hotels an' tell every thing I know."

"Whoop!" yelled Matt, jumping up and knocking his heels together. "Then you'll be took up for a thief."

"I don't care. I'll be took up some time, most likely, an' it might as well be this week as next. I ain't to blame 'cause the money ain't where I left it, an' I won't be larruped for it nuther."

Matt was in a quandary, and he could not see any way to get out of it without lowering his dignity. According to his way of thinking Jake deserved punishment for the course he had pursued, but Matt dared not administer it for fear that the boy would take revenge on him in the manner he had threatened. At this juncture Sam came to his assistance.

"Look a yer, pap," said he. "You was hid in the bresh where you could see the sheriff an' his crowd when they crossed the outlet on

the mornin' they stole Jake's canoe, wasn't you? Well, couldn't you have seen the gun-cases if they had 'em in their hands?"

Matt said he thought he could.

"You didn't see 'em, did you? Then don't that go to prove that the guides didn't find the guns when they found the canoe? Somebody else took 'em, an' the money, too."

"Who do you reckon it was?"

"I'll bet it was that Bigden crowd."

"I'll bet it was too," exclaimed Jake, catching at the suggestion as drowning men catch at straws. Of course he knew that Tom and his cousins carried off the guns, for he had seen them do it; but he dared not say so, for fear that his father would punish him for permitting it. Where the money went was a question that was altogether too deep for him. Matt was so impressed by Sam's answer that he found it necessary to sit down and fill and light his pipe.

"I'll bet it was, too," said he, when he had taken a few long whiffs. "I thought that Bigden boy was mighty sot up an' independent the second time I seen him, an' he

could afford to be, knowin', as he did, that I couldn't perduce the guns. Now what's to be done about it?"

"Why can't we take a run down to their camp to-morrer an' see what they've got in it?" said Jake. "Of course we'll have to swim to get on their side of the creek—"

"An' jest for the reason that we ain't got no boat," snarled Matt. "That's what comes of my givin' that canoe to you 'stead of keepin' it for my own. You hid it where they could find it, but I would have took better care of it. Now, le's go to camp an' eat some of the grub that the ole woman helped herself to in Rube's cabin. Jake, I'll let you off till to-morrer, an' I won't tech you at all if we find the money an' guns in Bigden's camp; but if we don't find 'em I'll have to do a pap's dooty by you."

Jake, glad to have even a short respite, made no reply, but he did some rapid thinking.

Now it so happened that Tom and his cousins were not at home when Matt Coyle and his young allies visited their camp on the following day. They had gone to Indian Lake after their mail. Contrary to their usual cus-

tom they all went, each one of the party declaring, with some emphasis, that he was sick and tired of acting as camp-keeper, while his companions were off somewhere enjoying themselves, and wouldn't do it any more because it was not necessary. They could take their most valuable things with them in their canoes and the rest could be concealed. The result of this arrangement was that when the squatter and his boys found the camp they found nothing else.

This was the day that Joe Wayring and his chums arrived at Indian Lake, and Tom and his friends found them standing on the beach, talking with Mr. Swan, as I have recorded. After exchanging a few common-place remarks with the new-comers, Tom kept on toward the hotel.

"I see Joe has brought his canvas canoe back with him," observed Tom. "If Matt Coyle knew it how long do you think it would be before he would manage to steal it again?"

"I hope you won't put him up to it," said Loren. "You once got yourself into a bad scrape by doing that, and it was more by good

luck than good management that you wriggled out of it."

"I haven't forgotten it," replied Tom, with a light laugh. "I assure you that I shall have no more suggestions to make to Matt Coyle; but I do wish he could make things so hot for Wayring and his party that they couldn't stay here. They haven't forgotten how to be mean, have they? They wouldn't tell us where they were going to find trout-fishing, so we will watch and find out for ourselves."

When Tom's letters, which came addressed to the care of the Sportsman's Home, were handed out he found that one of them contained a request for his immediate return to Mount Airy. Some of his New London friends were at his father's house, and if Tom and his cousins wished to see them they had better come home without delay.

"Well, I'd as soon go to-morrow as next day, for I am tired of life in the woods," said Tom. "If we had only brought our blankets and provisions along, we could have made a start from here; but as we didn't do it some one will have to go to camp for them. It

won't be necessary for all to go, so I propose that we draw lots to see who goes and who stays."

Without waiting to hear from the others on the subject, Tom arranged three sticks of different lengths in his closed hands, saying, as he held them out to Loren,

"The one who gets the shortest stick is elected."

Loren and Ralph made selection, and Tom was left with the shortest stick in his hand. Of course he was mad about it. He always was when he was beaten.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOE WAYRING'S PLUCK.

SOMETIMES there is more in drawing lots than those who take part in it imagine, and so it proved in this instance. If Ralph or Loren had drawn the shortest stick, some things that I have yet to tell of never would have happened.

"I'm elected," said Tom, spitefully, "but I'll stand by the agreement. I have plenty of time to go down to camp and return before dark, so I will wait and see what Wayring is going to do."

"Do you want to go with him?" inquired Ralph.

"How can I when we are going home in the morning?"

"Then what difference does it make to you where Wayring goes?"

"I don't know that it makes any difference. I simply wish to satisfy my curiosity."

It did not take many minutes to do that. After a little more conversation with Mr. Swan Joe came toward the storehouse, in front of whose open door Tom and his cousins were standing. There they met Morris, the guide, who cautioned them against quarreling with their compass in case they found themselves bewildered in the unbroken wilderness through which they must pass in order to reach No-Man's Pond. When Joe and his chums came out of the store with their loaded camp-baskets on their back, Morris also came out and accosted Tom.

"This is the first chance I have had to thank you young gentlemen for your generosity," said he. "Mr. Hanson has given me half the reward you earned by restoring those guns and which you did not claim."

"You are very welcome, I am sure," answered Tom. "Were you with the party that found Wayring's canoe? If you had looked a little further you might have found the guns, too. How about that money? Heard any thing of it lately?"

"Not so very," replied the guide. "All we

know is, that Jake Coyle cheated the robbers out of it very neatly, hid it somewhere, and then took himself off. It is over on your side of the lake; we are sure of that. You seem to be lucky, so why don't you hunt it up and claim the six hundred?"

"If you men who know every foot of the woods can't find it, we wouldn't stand much of a show," said Ralph. "Do you know where Wayring and his cronies have started for? I see that they have left their skiff behind and that Mr. Swan is taking care of it."

"They're bound to catch some legal trout before they go home, and are going to No-Man's Pond after them. That's twelve miles from here, and through the thickest woods any body ever heard of. They'll catch fish, but, as I told them, they will have a time getting there."

Tom's curiosity was satisfied now, and, as there was nothing more to detain him at the lake, he was ready to undertake the disagreeable duty to which he had been "elected." The trip to and from the camp was disagreeable only because Tom did not want to make

it just then. He would have preferred to stay and seek an introduction to some of the pretty girls who had been registered at the hotel since his last visit, and who were now in full possession of the lawn tennis court.

When Tom reached the grove in which he and his cousins had spent their two weeks outing, an unpleasant surprise awaited him. He saw nothing suspicious about the camp; indeed he did not look for it; but in less than half a minute after he beached his canoe and disembarked he was surrounded by Matt Coyle and his boys, who glared savagely at him and brandished switches over his head.

"Well, sir, we've ketched one of ye," said Matt, laying hold of Tom's collar. "Now will you own up or won't you?"

With a quick jerk Tom freed himself from the squatter's grasp and turned and faced him. He was so bold and defiant that Matt quailed before him.

"What have you to say to me?" demanded Tom, with flashing eyes. "Keep your distance if you expect me to talk to you. I was in hopes I had seen the last of you."

"Well, you see you ain't, don't you?" answered the squatter, calling all his courage to his aid. "You stole them two guns of me an' them six thousand dollars besides. We've come after 'em, an' we're goin' to have 'em, too."

"I haven't seen your guns or your money, either," replied Tom. "Who told you I had?"

"Nobody," said Matt, who never could take time to think when he was excited or angry. "We jest suspicion you."

"Then go and 'suspicion' somebody else. You are wide of the mark. I know you have lost the guns, for Swan found them when he found the canoe. Morris told me a little while ago that Hanson had paid him part of the reward. But I didn't know about the money. Here's Jake; why don't you make him tell where it is? Every body knows that he hid it—"

"Yes; but it ain't there now," shouted Matt. "It's been took outen the place where he left it, an' none of us don't know nothin' about it."

What evil genius put it into Tom's head to say, "I know where it is?"

"That's what we suspicioned all along, an' that's what brung us here," exclaimed the squatter, shaking his switch at the boy, while Sam's face grew as white as a sheet. He recoiled a step or two and looked anxiously at Tom.

"But I haven't got it and never had," continued the latter. "Do you know where No-Man's Pond is? Well, if you will go there, you will find your old friend Wayring and his party; and they've got your money."

"Why—why, how did they come by it?" stammered Matt.

"How do you suppose I know? They probably found it where Jake hid it. I don't know of any other way they could get it."

"But they ain't been here long enough to do much runnin' around," Matt reminded him.

"They have been here three days, and that's long enough for them to cover a good many miles in that fast-going skiff of theirs."

"But we've been right there at the cove all the time, an' they couldn't have come snoopin'

around without us hearin' them," said Matt, who hardly knew whether he stood on his head or his feet. "What took 'em so far up the creek, an' how did they know where the money was hid?"

"I don't know any thing about that. I simply tell you that I saw those two valises in Joe Wayring's camp-basket to-day, and that you will never handle a dollar of it."

"Why, they're wusser'n thieves theirselves. Do you reckon they took it to No-Man's Pond with 'em?"

"They certainly did not leave it at the hotel," replied Tom. "Perhaps they don't mean to go to No-Man's Pond at all. They may be striking for Irvington, for all I know, intending to claim the reward when they give up the money."

"They shan't never get there," yelled Matt, who believed every word of this ridiculous story. "I wish we was on t'other side of the lake."

"The only way you can get there is to go down to the outlet and ask some of your friends living there to set you across," replied Tom;

and as he spoke he stepped up to an evergreen, pressed the thick branches down with both hands, and took from its place of concealment a roll of blankets. From other trees he took more blankets, a lot of tin dishes, and provisions enough to last a small party of moderate eaters a week or more. Matt and his hungry family could, no doubt, have made way with them in a single day. They watched the boy's movements with the keenest interest. They had ransacked every hole and corner of the grove before Tom came, overturning logs and throwing leaves aside, but their hour's work had not been rewarded by so much as a can of beans. They were as surprised as children are the first time they see a magician take money out of a borrowed hat.

"That bangs me," said Matt.

"I don't suppose I should have found any of these things if you had thought to look up instead of down," replied Tom.

"I'd like mighty well to have the grub," was the squatter's answer. "We don't see nothin' good to eat from one year's end to another's."

To Matt's great surprise and joy Tom said—

"You may have the grub. I can get more at the hotel. There is an old blanket that you can have to wrap it up in. Now look here: Are you going to follow Wayring to No-Man's Pond?"

"You're mighty right, I am," said Matt, emphatically.

"I don't know whether or not you will find him there," Tom went on. "But if you do don't mention my name. Don't let him even suspect that you have seen me this vacation. Don't refer to me in any way; do you hear?"

"Do you reckon I've got a pair of ears?"

"I reckon you have; and I can see for myself that they are big enough for two men. If I were in your place, I would dig out of this country and never come back."

"I've been thinkin' of doin' it," said Matt.

"The whole region is in arms against you, and it is a mystery to me how you have kept out of the clutches of the law as long as you have. But if they don't catch you before they will surely catch you when the first snow

comes. Mark that. They will track you down as they would a mink."

"Don't I know that?" exclaimed Matt, growing red in the face with anger. "When the snow comes we'll have to stick clost to camp, for if we go out we shall leave a trail that can be easy follered. But what'll we do when our grub is all gone?"

"That's your lookout and not mine," said Tom, shrugging his shoulders. "Go off somewhere. Find a strange place where you are not known, and then you can go and come without fear of being tracked down."

So saying Tom tossed the blankets into his canoe, stepped in himself and shoved away from the beach, leaving three astonished, alarmed, and angry persons behind. If Sam Coyle had been alone there would have been strange scenes enacted in the grove, for Sam was pretty near frantic. Like his father, he believed the story that Tom Bigden had cooked up on the spur of the moment, and from that time forward he was one of Joe Wayring's most implacable foes. As for Matt, he was utterly bewildered—stunned. Once again he told him-

self that there was something wrong somewhere. Cunning as he had showed himself to be in outwitting the guides and officers of the law, he never parted with Tom Bigden without feeling that the boy had got the better of him in some way. Jake Coyle was the frightened one of the party. His father had promised him a terrible beating, which, upon reflection, he had decided to postpone until he could learn whether or not the six thousand dollars were concealed in Tom Bigden's camp. Would the whipping be forthcoming now that the money had not been found? Having had a good night's sleep and something nourishing to eat, Jake was stronger and more courageous than he had been the day before, and he made up his mind that he wouldn't be whipped at all. He had outrun his clumsy father more than once, and was sure he could do it again. Matt must have been thinking about this very thing, for he said, as he spread the blanket upon the ground and began tossing the provisions into it—

"If I done a pap's dooty by you, Jakey, I'd larrup you good fashion to pay you for hidin'

that there money where Joe Wayring an' his friends could find it; but I'll let you off agin for a little while. We'll put as straight for No-Man's Pond as we can go, an' if I find that Joe's got the money I won't do nothin' to you; me an' you will be friends like we've always been. But if he ain't got it, or if he's hid it where we can't find it, then there'll be such a row betwixt me an' you that the folks up to Injun Lake will think there's a harrycane got loose in the woods."

Jake drew a long breath of relief, but Sam wanted to yell. The latter was strongly opposed to going to No-Man's Pond. His great desire was to return to camp, separate himself from the rest of the family as soon as he could, and look into the tree in which he had concealed the money. Somehow he could not bring himself to believe that it had been found and carried off.

"Say, pap, I wouldn't go acrost the lake if I was you," Sam ventured to say. "So long's we stay over yer we're safe, 'cause the guides can't get to us without our bein' knowin' to it; but if we go to trampin'

through woods that we are liable to get lost in they may jump down on us afore we can wink twice."

"No they won't," said Matt, confidently. "I'm too ole a coon to be ketched that a-way. Leastwise I ain't a-goin' to let them six thousand go without makin' the best kind of a fight for 'em."

"But somebody oughter go to camp an' tell mam where we're goin'," Sam insisted. "She'll be scared if we don't show up by the time it comes dark. I'd jest as soon go as not, and I'll jine you agin at the outlet."

"Sam, what's the matter of you?" exclaimed Matt. "You always was sich a coward you would go hungry before you would sneak out of nights an' steal grub for us to eat; but you've got to stand up to the rack this time, I bet you. I need your help; an' if I see you makin' the least sign of holdin' back I'll give you the twin brother to the lickin' I promised Jake."

That was what Sam was afraid of, and it was the only thing that kept him from running off and making the best of his way to the

tree in which he had hidden the money. Until he had satisfied himself that it was safe he could neither eat nor sleep.

Having tied the provisions up in as small a compass as possible, Matt raised the bundle to his shoulder, picked up his rifle, and set out at a rapid pace for the outlet, Jake and Sam following close behind. They were ferried across by one of the vagabonds who had given the superintendent of the hatchery so much trouble, and who expressed the greatest surprise and pleasure at meeting them. But Matt was not deceived by his friendly speech. He knew that the man would have made a prisoner of him in a minute if he had possessed the power.

"I never thought to set eyes on you again," was the way in which he welcomed Matt and his boys. "You've kept yourselves tol'able close since Swan burned your camp, ain't you? An' they do say that Jakey has made six thousand dollars clean cash outen that Irvin' ton bank robbery. Course I'll set you acrost. Goin' to change your quarters, be you? Where do you reckon you'll bring up?"

"New London," replied Matt, readily. "From there we'll take a boat to some place on the Sound where they want wood-choppers, an' then we'll settle down an' go to work."

"But the ole woman ain't with you."

"She's goin' cross lots, 'cause she didn't think she could stand the long tramp that me and the boys are goin' to take. Yes; we're goin' to hide ourselves durin' the winter, an' when spring comes mebbe we'll come too. They'll forget all about us by that time."

"Well, I hope the constables won't foller you through the woods."

"It wouldn't be healthy for any body to do that," replied Matt, looking sharply at the man with his little black eyes. "A feller who can hit a squirrel's head at every shot can throw a bullet middlin' clost to a mark the bigness of a constable."

This was a threat, and the man who ferried them across the outlet took it as such. As he was too timid as well as too indolent to take any steps that would lead to the squatter's apprehension, he contented himself by going back to his cabin, smoking a pipe, and wishing

he had the reward that had been put upon Matt's head.

The pursuers had lost a good deal of time in going from Tom Bigden's camp to the outlet, but they made up for it by the fast traveling they did after they were set across. If Matt had not missed his way, he might have come up with Joe that night. As it was, he and his boys went into camp about three miles from the spring-hole. During their journey they came near showing themselves to a couple of individuals who passed through the woods a hundred yards in advance, heading toward Indian Lake; but Matt, always on the watch, dropped in time to avoid discovery, and the boys touched the ground almost as soon as he did.

"Who be they?" whispered the squatter, peering through the bushes in the vain effort to obtain a view of the strangers' faces.

"They're them two fellers that always runs with Joe Wayring," answered Jake.

"Sure?" asked Matt.

"Sure's I can be without seein' 'em closter."

"That's who they be, pap," said Sam. "I

know, 'cause they've got the same kind of clothes and the same kind of hats on 'em."

Sam and Jake were deceived by the hunting suits worn by the strangers. The latter were a couple of sportsmen who had made a short excursion into the woods without a guide, and were now on their way to their hotel. Matt took a minute or two in which to think over the situation.

"Look sharp," said he, in an excited whisper, "an' see if they have got camp-baskets onto their backs or grip-sacks in their hands. If they have, we'll bounce 'em quicker."

"They ain't got nary thing in their hands but jest fish-poles," answered Sam. "I can see 'em plain. The things they've got on their backs is knapsacks."

"Then they must have left Joe Wayring an' the money alone at the spring-hole," chuckled Matt. "They can't go to Injun Lake an' turn around and come back before the middle of forenoon to-morrer, an' by the time they see No-Man's Pond again we'll be through with our business. I tell you things is beginnin' to

run my way onct more. Ain't you sorry you come, Sammy? We shall find Joe alone at the pond, and it'll be the easiest thing in the world to make him trot out that money or tell where he's hid it."

"But supposin' he won't do it?" said Jake. "What'll you do to him, pap?"

"We'll tie him to a tree an' thrash him so't he won't never get over it," said the squatter, through his teeth. "That boy has put me to a sight of trouble ever sense I first heard of him, an' now I'm goin' to take my satisfaction outen him. We'll make him ax our parding an' acknowledge that we're just as good as he is, even if we ain't got no good clothes to wear."

"An' when you get through I'll take a hand, an' pay him for the whack he give me in the face with your paddle," chimed in Jake.

"An' I'll pay him for—for—bein' so mean to all of us," said Sam.

He came near betraying himself that time. What he was about to say was that he would pay Joe Wayring for stealing the money.

"You can do jest what you please with him,

an' I won't say a word agin it," answered the squatter. "The way them rich folks has always run over us ain't to be put up with no longer."

Pursuers and pursued slept soundly within three miles of one another that night, but the morning's sun found them all astir. While Joe and his companions were working like beavers on their bark shanty, Matt Coyle was wasting his time in searching for the portage that led from Indian Lake to No-Man's Pond. He passed the best part of the day in recovering his bearings, and the afternoon was far spent when Jake laid his hand on his arm and pointed silently through the bushes ahead of him. Matt looked, and saw the smoke of a camp-fire curling up toward the tree-tops. He listened, but no sound came to his ears to indicate that the camp was occupied. Arthur and Roy had gone in the canvas canoe to explore the spring-hole and Joe was resting after his work, thinking the while of almost every thing and every body except Matt Coyle.

"I don't reckon he's there, pap," said Jake in a cautious whisper.

"He's there or thereabouts," was Matt's reply. "Mebbe he's went out on the pond to ketch some trout for his supper. If he has, we'll be in time to help him eat 'em, won't we? Jakey, you crawl up, careful like, an' take a peep at things. Me an' Sam 'll stay here till you come back."

Matt never went into danger himself if he could help it, but always sent Jake; and the boy had become so accustomed to it that he obeyed this order without the least hesitation. He crept away on his hands and knees, and at the end of a quarter of an hour returned with a most gratifying report.

"Joe's there, an' he's all alone," whispered Jake. "He's layin' under a tree an' acts like he's asleep."

"So much the better for us," replied Matt, gleefully rubbing his hands together. "That money is our'n. Now, Jakey, you go that-away; Sam, you go this way; an' I'll keep in the middle. In that way we shall have him surrounded an' he can't give us the slip. When you hear me whistle like a quail, jump up an' grab him."

"But, pap, he's got a gun," said Jake, apprehensively. "I seen it layin' on the ground clost to him."

"What of it?" Matt demanded, in angry tones. "That's the very reason I want you to grab him; so's he won't have time to use his gun. Now, then, here we go, quiet like, an' still."

The three moved off so silently that Joe Wayring would not have heard them if he had been awake and listening for their appoach. They came up on each side of the camp, cutting off every avenue of escape, and at the signal agreed upon made a simultaneous rush. Before Joe could open his eyes he was powerless, for Matt Coyle had seized both his hands, crossed them upon his breast, and pinned them there with a vise-like grasp.

"It's come our turn to boss things," said the squatter, returning Joe's astonished look with an angry scowl. "We'll learn you to drive us outen Mount Airy an' tear our house down jest 'cause we're poor folks an' ain't got no good clothes to wear. Jakey, you an' Sam look around an' find a rope or something to tie him with."

"What are you going to do?" asked Joe, when he found his tongue.

"That depends on yourself," answered Matt. "You can get off without a scratch if you will do jest what I tell you; but if you don't it will be wuss for you. Where is it?"

"Where's what?" said Joe, innocently.

"Now jest listen at the blockhead!" exclaimed Matt. "You don't know what I mean, don't you? I mean the money you stole from us. The money, you varmint." And whenever he said "money" he jammed Joe's hands down upon his breast with terrific force. "The money, I say. Where is it?"

"All the money I have is in my pocket," replied Joe. "If you want it, I can't hinder you from taking it." He spoke with difficulty, for Matt's furious lunges had nearly knocked the breath out of his body.

"Whoop!" yelled the squatter. "Listen at you! I don't want the money that's into your pocket. I want what was stole from the bank. It b'longs to me, an' I'm goin' to have it. Where is it, I tell you."

"I don't know the first thing about it. I never saw it."

"Mebbe you'll think different before we get through with you," said Matt; "found the rope, have you, Jakey? All right. Stand by to tie his hands when I tell you; an', Sam, you pull off his blue shirt. We won't fool with him no longer."

So saying the squatter arose to his feet, pulling Joe up with him. In a few minutes more the boy was standing with his face to a tree, and his hands and feet were fastened to it. But the work was not accomplished without a terrific struggle, I assure you. Joe Wayring fought desperately, and during the *melee* Jake was floored by a neat left-hander in the jaw, and Sam received a kick that doubled him up in short order. Of course this vigorous treatment added to their fury, but Matt was disposed to be hilarious over it.

"Well, then, what made you hide the money where he could find it, if you didn't want to get a whack from his fist?" said he. "If you had brung it straight to me, like you oughter done, Joe never would a hit you."

"That makes another thing that I've got to pay him for," groaned Jake. "Hurry up an' get through with him, pap, 'cause I want to get at him."

"Then go an' cut some good tough hickories, both of you. They'll be back in a few minutes," said Matt, as the boys took their knives from their pockets and disappeared from view, "an' before they come, you had better make up your mind to tell me what you have done with that money. I've got all the proof I want that it was seed in your camp-basket yesterday."

"Who told you so?" inquired Joe.

"I ain't namin' no names," replied Matt; and then, for the first time, it occurred to him that if the valises were in Joe's camp-basket yesterday they might be there yet, and he at once proceeded to satisfy himself on that point. The contents of all the baskets were quickly thrown out upon the ground, but the valises were not brought to light.

"I done that jest 'cause I happened to think of it, an' not 'cause I expected to find the money," Matt exclaimed. "I knowed you

would hide it as soon as you got here. The boys is comin'. They'd like amazin' well to larrup you on your bare back, an' they will do it too; we'll all do it, if you don't quit bein' so pig-headed an' tell us right where we can go an' find that money. Speak quick. Will you do it?"

"I tell you I don't know any thing about it," replied Joe, "and you can't make me say any thing else. If any body told you a different story, which I don't believe, he fooled you. That's all I've got to say."

Just then Jake and Sam came out of the bushes with their hands full of switches.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GUIDE "SURROUNDS" MATT'S CAMP.

"HOW do you like the looks of *them?*" said Matt Coyle, picking up one of the switches and flourishing it before Joe's face. "It's hickory an' it'll cut. Whew! I don't like to think how it will cut when it's laid on good and strong. Now, then, where is it? You see that we are in dead 'arnest, I reckon, don't you? What have you done with it?"

It was at this juncture that the canvas canoe carrying Roy Sheldon and Arthur Hastings came around the point in full view of the camp. The boys were so surprised at what they saw before them that for a minute or two they were incapable of action. They were as motionless as so many sticks of wood; and, although their blood boiled with indignation when they saw Jake so unmercifully beaten,

they never said a word. But, when Matt drew back as if he were about to strike Joe with the switch he held in his hand, they had life enough in them.

"Hold on there! If you touch that boy I will put more holes through you than you ever saw in a skimmer," shouted Arthur, as he raised his gun to his shoulder; and the squatter's triumph was cut short.

"This is an outrage that shall not be overlooked," said Roy, plunging his paddle into the water and sending the canvas canoe rapidly toward the beach. "Keep him covered, Art, so that he can't escape, and we'll march the whole caboodle of them to Indian Lake."

Before the words had fairly left Roy's lips Arthur found, to his intense amazement, that he was pointing his gun at the bushes, instead of covering Matt Coyle's head. The squatter and his boys had dropped to the ground, and that was the last that was seen of them. If three trap-doors had opened beneath their feet, they could not have disappeared with more astonishing and bewildering celerity. The boys did not wait to beach the canoe but

jumped overboard, as soon as they could see bottom, and rushed to Joe's relief.

"Who, what—how—what's the meaning of this?" stammered Roy, drawing his knife across the rope that held the prisoner's hands, while Arthur severed the one with which his feet were confined. "How came those vagabonds up here, and what was it that Tom Bigden told them about money?"

Joe Wayring stretched his arms and briefly explained.

"You came just in time, boys," said he, in conclusion. "Did you see Jake's face when Matt got through beating him? That was a contemptible thing for Matt to do, and he ought to be punished for it."

"Your back would have looked worse than that if we had delayed our coming a few minutes longer," said Roy. "How did you feel when Matt told you that he had seen Art and me putting for the lake as fast as we could go?"

"I didn't pay the least attention to it, for I thought he said it to frighten me. It seems that Jake has lost track of the money that was

stolen from the Irvington bank; but if Tom Bigden said he had seen it in my camp-basket, I don't see what induced him to do it."

"What was it that induced him to tell Matt to steal your canoe?" asked Arthur.

"I don't know that he did. I only think so from what I have heard. Now, fellows," said Joe calmly, but with determination, "my fishing is ended for a while, and I am going on the war-path. I'll see whether or not I am to be tormented in this way by people who can not truthfully say that I ever did the first thing to injure them."

"Count us in," said Arthur. "I wish the portage was clear so that we could start for the lake at once; but I am afraid to try it in the dark."

"We mustn't try it in the dark. We'd get lost before we had gone a hundred yards," said Roy. "We'll make an early start in the morning. I would give something handsome if I knew just how this thing stands, and how Matt Coyle found out that we were camping here. I wonder what Tom will have to say for himself when the matter is brought into court."

"I can't believe that he had any thing to do with it," answered Joe. "If he has half the sense I give him credit for, he must see that he would sooner or later bring himself into trouble by acting as Matt Coyle's counselor."

"He's got sense enough; no one disputes that," said Roy. "But I tell you he is at the bottom of this trouble. Matt and his boys knew what they were doing when they crossed to this side of the lake and came straight to No-Man's Pond."

"That's what I say," chimed in Arthur.

"Well," replied Joe, "I shall need better evidence than a vagabond's unsupported word before I will believe that Tom Bigden is to blame for any thing that has happened to me to-day. I don't doubt that his will is good enough; but he would be afraid to put himself into the power of such a fellow as Matt Coyle. At any rate I'll not make trouble for him if I can help it; but I'll never rest easy till Matt's whole tribe has been arrested or driven so far out of the country that they can't get back in a hurry."

"This is what we get by coming into the woods without our body-guard," said Arthur. "If Jim had been here Matt could not have stolen a march on you as easily as he did."

I believe I forgot to tell you that Jim, Arthur Hastings's little spaniel, was not with the boys this trip. A few days prior to his master's departure for Indian Lake he managed to get run over by a loaded wagon, and Arthur had left him at home under the doctor's care. Jim hated the squatter and his kind most cordially, and would certainly have given the alarm the moment they came within scenting distance of the camp.

That night the boys did not sleep a great while at a time. Not an hour passed that I did not see one of them punching up the fire or walking around the shanty with his gun in his hands. But they were not disturbed. Matt Coyle had seen enough of Arthur Hastings and his double-barrel for one while, and if he was anywhere in the neighborhood he did not show himself. When day broke Joe Wayring and his friends did not linger to take a dip in the pond or run races along the beach,

but ate a hastily prepared breakfast, packed their camp-baskets, and set out for the lake. They held a straight course for it, but the traveling was so difficult that it was high noon before they got there. The first man they saw was Mr. Swan, who was just pushing away from the landing in front of the Sportsman's Home. His canoe was loaded, and that proved that he was going somewhere.

"Hallo!" was his cheery greeting. "Did you get lost or run out of grub or what? I did not expect to see you again for two or three weeks."

"We didn't get lost, and we've lots of grub left," replied Arthur. "Where have you started for, if it is a fair question?"

"I am going where the rest of the boys are going, or gone; into the woods to find Matt Coyle's trail and Jake's," answered the guide. "If I can't find but one I'd a little rather have Jake, because there's a bigger reward offered for him. There are a dozen or fifteen men in the woods now, and there'll be as many more by this time to-morrow. Them vagabonds can't run loose any longer, for the boys are in

dead earnest now, and have broken up into little parties instead of going in a body. In that way they can cover more ground, and stand a better chance of getting a big slice of the reward. Of course you haven't seen Coyle lately?"

"Haven't we, though?" exclaimed Roy. "There's where you are mistaken. Are you in a very great hurry? Then come ashore and I will tell you a little story."

The guide smiled as he turned his canoe toward the beach, but before Roy Sheldon had talked to him five minutes the smile gave place to a frown. He listened in the greatest amazement to the boy's brief and rapid narration of the exciting incidents that had happened at the spring-hole, said "I swan to man!" a good many times, and when Roy ceased speaking sat down on the ground right where he stood, there being no log handy, to think the matter over.

"Well, well! So Matt broke up your fishing picnic and frightened you away from the pond, did he?" said the guide, after a long pause. "I don't know as I blame you for

wanting to get back among folks. I'd be scared too, if some fellers should tie me to a tree and threaten to wallop me."

"Matt broke up our fishing for the present, but we want you to understand that he didn't scare us away from the pond," said Arthur, earnestly. "We are going to Irvington to lodge a complaint against him, and as soon as that has been done we intend to take a hand in hunting him up."

"You? You boys alone?" exclaimed the guide.

"Yes; we three fellows alone, unless you will go with us. But you mustn't think we are afraid of him. If he is such a terrible man, what's the reason he took to his heels the minute he saw the muzzle of Art's gun looking him in the face?"

"Most any body would run under them circumstances if he thought he had the ghost of a chance," replied Mr. Swan. "You had the drop on him."

"But we didn't have the drop on him last night when we were asleep, did we? If he was so sure that money was in our camp, what's

the reason he didn't come and get it after dark? He was afraid to try it."

"Most likely he was," answered the guide. "Well, if you're bound to go, I'd like to have you with me so't I can sorter keep an eye on you. Let's go and get your skiff. I put it in one of the boathouses under cover."

"But we want to make complaint against Matt," said Joe.

"Why not wait till he has been arrested for stealing them guns and that canoe, and then make it? You will save at least four days by it, and by that time Matt may be took up and you and me have no hand in it. We kinder thought him and his crowd had skipped the country, because we ain't seen none of 'em lately; but the boys *will* be surprised, and mad too, when they hear what he done in your camp."

While the guide was talking in this way he led the boys along the beach toward the boathouse in which he had placed their skiff for safekeeping. To put it into the water, take the provisions out of the camp-baskets and stow them in the lockers, ship the oars and

return to the place where Mr. Swan had left his canoe, was but a few minutes' work. When the latter shoved off from the beach the two boats moved side by side, I occupying my usual place on the stern locker.

"There's one question that has been running in my mind ever since I heard your story, and which I ain't been able to answer yet," observed the guide, as the boys slackened their pace so that the canoe could keep up. "What made Matt Coyle think that you boys had the money in your possession, and how did he know where to find you? It looks to me as though somebody had posted him in regard to your movements, and if Tom Bigden had been in your company since you came here I should say that he was the chap. Do you suspicion him?"

Arthur and Roy looked at Joe as if to say: "What do you think of it now?" and the latter replied:

"I don't know whether to suspect him or not."

"Well, if Tom's mixed up in it, it won't take long to find it out," said the guide,

indifferently. "The minute Matt is brought before the justice he'll blab every thing he knows."

When Joe heard this he almost wished that he had not been in such haste to declare that he would never rest easy until Matt and his family had been arrested or driven so far out of the country that they wouldn't get back in a hurry. Joe was indignant, as he had reason to be, but he was not vindictive.

"I'd rather Matt would get off scott free than be the means of bringing Tom Bigden into disgrace," was his mental reflection. "If I could help him out of the country I would do it. But then, there's the money. What's to be done about that? Do you suppose Jake has really lost track of those six thousand dollars?" he added, aloud.

"I am sure of it," answered Roy, "What put that thought into your head?"

"If he intended to share it with the members of his family, what's the reason he did not take it to his father the minute he found it?" asked Joe, in reply. "Every thing goes to prove that Jake wants all the money, and if

he can make his father believe that he has lost it of course he will not be expected to divide."

"Oh, you're off the track," said Arthur, confidently. "If Jake had told Matt any funny story like that, don't you think the beating he got up there at the spring-hole would have brought the truth out of him? What do you think about it, Mr. Swan?"

"I haven't yet made up my mind," replied the guide. "This much I know. That money is hidden somewhere in the woods, and it's going to be no fool of a job to find it."

"Have you decided upon any plan of action?"

"Well, yes. We might as well hunt for a needle in a hay-stack as to go wandering about through the timber looking for a couple of grip-sacks, for I have been told that these woods cover almost two thousand square miles of ground. There must be some sort of system about the search, or it won't amount to any thing. The rest of the boys are trying to catch Matt and all his family, believing that if they can do that they will get the money.

Perhaps they will, and perhaps they won't. I wasn't going to do business that way. I intended to find their camp the first thing I did, and hang around it night and day till I got a clew. If Jake knows where the money is, he'll have to go to it every little while to make sure it is safe, won't he?"

The boys all thought he would, and Joe said:

"If I were in Jake's place I would go to it just once, and when I found it I'd take it and leave the country. A brute of a father who pounded me as Matt pounded Jake should not see a cent of the money."

"Mebbe that's what Jake means to do," answered the guide. "I hope it is, and that we will be in sight when he tries it; for it will be no trouble at all for us to slip up and gobble him and the money at the same time. That would scare Matt, who would lose no time in getting away from these woods."

"That's just what I hope he will do," said Joe, to himself. "Somehow I can't bear the thought of seeing him come into court to get a Mount Airy boy into trouble."

"I've often thought of it as a curious thing that the stolen guns and your canvas canoe should have been found in the same place, and that place the cove where Matt's camp used to be," said Mr. Swan, after a little pause. "By putting this and that together, I have come to the conclusion that Matt and his family hang out near that cove, believing it to be the safest place for them. I thought I would go up there after dark and skirmish around a bit. What do you think?"

"If that is what you have decided upon, why, go ahead," replied Arthur. "We shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that we are busy, even if we don't accomplish any thing."

"We don't want to go near the cove until after dark," the guide went on. "We tried that once, you know, but Matt got wind of our coming and took himself safely off."

A plan of operations having been decided upon, the boys took Mr. Swan's canoe in tow and pulled for the lake with long and lusty strokes. Shortly after twelve o'clock they landed in a little grove to cook their dinner;

but, after they had taken a look at the heap of ashes, potato skins, charred chunks, withered hemlock boughs, fish-heads, bones, and empty fruit and bean cans that were scattered about, they told one another that they would go farther and find a neater place.

"This is the worst camp on the lake, isn't it?" said Roy. "The fellows who lived here were either new hands at the business or else they were a lazy lot."

They were both. The grove was the site of Tom Bigden's old camp, and a nice looking spot he and his cousins had made of it. But such groves were plenty along the beach. Another was quickly found, an excellent dinner was prepared and leisurely eaten, and after Mr. Swan had taken time to smoke a pipe the party shoved off and headed toward the creek that led to Matt Coyle's old camp.

"Now, then," said the guide, who thought it time to assume direction of affairs, "we don't want any more loud talking. And be careful how you let them oars rattle in the rowlocks. A slight noise can be heard a long dis-

tance in a quiet place like this, and Matt is always listening."

Having cast off the painter of his canoe, Mr. Swan went on ahead, and the skiff followed slowly in his wake. Mile after mile they passed over in silence, all unconscious of the fact that almost every thing they did was observed by one who threaded his way cautiously through the bushes abreast of them, and who would have given a large sum of money if he could have had one of their boats at his disposal for a few minutes.

So well did Mr. Swan regulate his pace that it was just dark when he and his young companions arrived at the mouth of the little stream which connected the creek with the cove in which Matt enacted that neat piece of strategy described by Fly-rod in his story. Here he stopped and listened for a long time. No sounds came from the woods to indicate that the squatter and his family were occupying their old camp; but that was no sign that they were not there, and the guide proceeded very cautiously. He did not attempt to force his canoe into the stream, but made a landing

below it, and the skiff drew up alongside of him.

"What's the next thing on the programme?" whispered Joe, lifting his oar out of the row-lock and laying it carefully on the thwarts. "Shall we all go in?"

"I reckon we might as well," replied the guide. "Why not?"

"You remember what happened the last time we were here, do you not?" replied Joe. "How Matt came around in our rear and threw away our things and stole two of our boats?"

"It ain't likely that I'll ever forget it," said Mr. Swan, "nor how mad we all were to see how completely he had outwitted us. But he can't do that this time, for we are not going into the cove. We'll leave the boats here."

"Matt Coyle isn't within a dozen miles of this place," said Roy, decidedly. "He's on the other side of the lake."

"That don't signify," answered Mr. Swan. "There are plenty of vagabones at the outlet who would set him across for the asking, and it ain't a very fur ways from there to this cove.

Now, if he is here, we'll not give him a chance to slip away from us like he did last time. You know right where the camp was, don't you? Well, I'll go off by myself and surround it. At the end of twenty minutes, as near as you can guess at it, creep up toward the place you think I am, no matter whether you hear from me or not. Spread out from the center as you go, so as to come upon the camp from all sides. If he isn't there, we'll find out whether or not he has been there very lately, and that will be something learned."

Mr. Swan lingered a minute or two to give a few additional instructions, and then moved silently away through the darkness. The first thing the boys did, when they found themselves alone, was to secure their guns and cartridge belts, and the second to draw the bows of the skiff and canoe upon the bank so that the current would not carry them away. After that they struck a match to see what time it was, and sat down to wait as patiently as they could for the twenty minutes to pass away.

"I hope Matt Coyle isn't here," said Joe,

suddenly. "Or if he is, I hope he will take the alarm and make off before Mr. Swan gets a sight of him."

"Well, you are a pretty fellow," said Roy, with a slight accent of disgust in his tones. "After what he has done to you, do you want him to get off?"

"Yes, I do; and I can't help it," answered Joe. "But it is not on his own account, I assure you. To me there is something repugnant in the thought that such a fellow as Matt Coyle can get any body into trouble, especially such a boy as Tom Bigden might be if he only would. If Tom put it into his head to steal my canoe, or if he told him that we had taken the six thousand dollars with us to No-Man's Pond—why, fellows, just think what a story that would be for him to tell in court?"

"Well, could Tom blame any body but himself if he did tell it?" demanded Arthur. "He had no business to have so much to do with that squatter. Where do you suppose the money is, any way?"

"Did it never occur to you that some of the

vagabonds who live at the outlet might have stumbled upon it?" asked Roy.

"Or that some other member of Matt's family, Sam for instance, might have found it where Jake hid it?" chimed in Joe.

"That's so," exclaimed Arthur. "But if Sam's got it what is he going to do with it? It would be little satisfaction to me to have so much money in my possession unless I could use some of it."

"The twenty minutes are up," said Joe, examining the face of his watch by the light of a match. "Mr. Swan has had time to 'surround' the camp, and we must be moving. We must be careful, also, and not get out of supporting distance of one another, for there is no telling what we may run onto in the dark."

It was not without fear and trembling that the boys began their advance upon the squatter's camp. They had given Mr. Swan to understand that they were not afraid of Matt, and they would have made their words good if it had been daylight and they had been standing on the defensive; but advancing upon

his supposed hiding-place in the dark was something they had not bargained for. Matt might be standing guard with a club in his hand, ready to brain the first one who showed himself.

"I declare, that's just what he is doing. There he is, standing by that fire."

So thought Joe Wayring, who by good luck happened to strike the well-beaten path that led through the evergreens from the cove to the spot whereon the squatter's miserable lean-to had once stood. Having no bushes to impede his progress, Joe crept rapidly forward on his hands and knees without making the slightest sound, and in a few moments came within sight of a glowing bed of coals, with a clearly defined pair of legs in front of it. A second glance showed Joe that the legs belonged to a man who loomed up wonderfully tall and stout in the darkness, and that he held across his breast something that looked like a bludgeon. He was gazing in Joe's direction, too, and that was the way he would undoubtedly run when he became aware that his enemies were closing in upon him. What was to be

done now, and where were Mr. Swan and the other boys?

"If he makes a charge he'll run over me and never know there was any thing in his path. I'll give him all the room he wants," soliloquized Joe; and, suiting the action to the word, he got upon his feet and backed softly into the bushes.

After standing a second or two in a listening attitude, the man kicked the coals together with his heavy boot, and threw upon them a dry hemlock branch, which instantly blazed up, revealing the guide's honest face. Joe was greatly relieved. "How you frightened me," said he, as he came down the path. "You looked as big as a tree, and I thought you were Matt Coyle, sure."

"You can see for yourself that he or somebody else has been here within a few hours," replied Mr. Swan, tossing another branch upon the coals.

"Do the signs tell you any thing?"

"Haven't seen any sign yet except this smouldering fire. Call up the rest of the fellows and we will go into camp back there at the

creek. In the morning we'll take a look around and see what we can see."

Guided by an occasional word from Joe the other two presently came up. By this time the fire was burning brightly, and by the aid of the light it gave they were enabled to examine the ground about it. They found the charred remains of the squatter's lean-to, but could not discover the first thing to give them a clew to the identity of the person or persons who built the fire. The guide was almost sure it was not Matt Coyle, for Matt invariably left some sort of rubbish behind him. Whoever he was, he had not been gone more than half an hour, for the coals had hardly ceased blazing when Mr. Swan found them. They lingered long enough to see the fire burn itself out and then started for the creek, where a great surprise awaited them.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK AT LAST.

A MORE astonished trio than Matt Coyle and his boys were when they heard Arthur Hastings's voice, and looked up to find the muzzle of his double-barrel pointed straight at their heads, had never been seen on the shores of No-Man's Pond. They really believed that they had seen Arthur and Roy in the woods going toward Indian Lake, and when they made a prisoner of Joe Wayring they thought they held him at their mercy. But, although Matt was surprised at the interruption, he was not to be easily beaten. He uttered a faint cry, which had more than once sent his whole family scurrying into the bushes, and in less time than it takes to write it he and his boys were out of sight. They wormed their way through the bushes with astonishing celerity, and by the time Roy and Arthur

reached the shore and released the captive from his bonds Matt and his allies were lying prone behind a log a short distance away, with their rifles pointed over it, waiting to be attacked.

"Jakey, you an' Sam was certainly mistaken when you said that the fellers we seen goin' through the woods was the same ones that always went with Joe Wayring," whispered Matt. "If it was them, how did they happen to come up in that there canvas canoe the way they did? My luck has turned agin me onct more, ain't it?"

"That Bigden boy played a trick on you," said Jake. He passed his hand over his battered face and could hardly repress a howl when he saw that it was covered with blood.

"I told you I'd lick ye if we didn't find the money in Joe's camp, didn't I?" said his father, fiercely. "Now I reckon you see that I was in earnest, don't you? If you had brung me the money the minute you got hold of it, I would have went halvers with you, an' you wouldn't have had that lookin' face, an' I wouldn't have been put to so much trouble. Next time bear in mind that your pap is boss

of this here house. You say that Bigden boy played a trick onto me. I begin to suspicion so myself; but, if he did, where's the money? Jakey, did you hide them grip-sacks in that hole where you said you did?"

"Sure's I live an' breathe I did," replied Jake, edging away from his father when he saw how savagely the latter scowled at him. "It was there the last time I seen it; but I don't know where it is now."

"What be we waitin' here for?" interrupted Sam. "Joe ain't got the money, an' why don't we go somewheres else an' look for it? Mam'll be scared if we don't come home purty quick."

"Where else shall we go an' look for it?" demanded the squatter.

"Why, down to—anywheres," said Sam, with some confusion.

"You had some place in your mind when you spoke," Matt insisted. "Down where?"

"Anywheres on the other side of the lake. It ain't never been brung over here, an' I didn't think so none of the time."

Very gradually it began to creep into Matt's

head that Sam had not acted at all like himself since their party left Tom Bigden's camp to go in pursuit of Joe Wayring. The boy had been opposed to it from the first, and showed great anxiety and impatience to return to camp and relieve his mother's suspense. How did she know but that they had fallen into the clutches of the law; and how was she going to find out unless one of their number went home to assure her that they were all safe and sound? It wasn't at all like Sam to express so much concern for his mother's comfort and peace of mind, and why should he do it now, Matt asked himself, unless he had some reason for desiring to go back to the cove?

"An' what should Sammy want to go back there for, less'n it's to look after something he's left behind?" soliloquized the squatter. "An' what's he left there if it ain't them two—Whoop! That's it, sure's you're born."

"What's the matter of you, pap?" exclaimed Sam.

Almost involuntarily Matt uttered the last words aloud, and of course his boys heard them and desired an explanation. Sam looked

frightened; but Jake's face was so badly wounded that no one could tell what its expression was. Matt looked surprised, then thoughtful, and finally replied:

"Yes, sir; that's it. That Bigden boy done sent us up here on a wild goose chase jest to draw suspicion from himself. He is the one that's got the money, and he's had it all the time."

"You've hit center, pap, sure's you're a foot high," exclaimed Sam. "I wondered why that Bigden boy was so ready to tell us where the money was, an' now I know. Will we go home now, pap?"

"We'll start at onct, an' by this time tomorrer we'll have the money an' the Bigden boy too. If he don't tell us what he's done with it, we'll tie him to a tree like we done with Joe Wayring. He ain't got Joe's pluck, Tom ain't, sassy as he lets on to be, an' when he sees a hickory whistlin' before his eyes he'll tell us all we want to know. I didn't think Tom would have the cheek to fool me that away when he knows well enough that I've got the upper hand of him."

The squatter said this as if he was in earnest, and as if he really thought he had got upon the track of the money at last; but while he talked he kept close watch of Sam's face, and saw enough there to satisfy him that his own boy, and not Tom Bigden, was the one who could tell him right where to look to find the lost treasure.

"Well, what be we waitin' here for?" repeated Sam, who was impatient to be off.

"I kinder thought that mebbe them fellers would make a rush on us soon's they turned Joe Wayring loose," answered Matt, "an' I wanted to be ready for 'em. But I don't reckon they're comin', so we'll go along. Jakey, I didn't lick you 'cause we didn't find the money in Joe's camp, but to pay you for not turnin' it over to me when you found it."

"Be you goin' to look in Tom Bigden's camp for it?" inquired Jake.

"I be," replied Matt, who had already determined upon a very different course of action.

"Well, you remember that Tom took away his blankets an' every thing else when we was

there, don't you?" continued Jake. "That looked to me as though he was goin' somewheres else to camp, or goin' home. If you don't find him nor the money nuther, then who you goin' to lick?"

"You needn't worry about that," said the squatter slowly, and in a tone which he meant to be very impressive. "If I don't find the money the very first time tryin', I'll tumble onto the feller who knows where it is; you may be sure of that."

Sam grew frightened again, while Jake shut his teeth hard and said to himself:

"That means me. But he 'won't tumble onto me agin, I bet you, 'cause when he gets on t'other side the lake I won't be within reach of him. I'm goin' to do something that'll make pap's eyes bung out as big as your fist when he hears of it. I ain't goin' to be pounded for nothing, an' that's all about it."

"Yes," continued Matt, who felt more confident of success now than at any other time during his search for the money. "I shall make a go of it by this hour to-morrer; you

hear me? Jakey, you remember the old blanket Tom Bigden give us that I used fur a knapsack to carry our grub in, don't you? Well, I dropped it when we was gettin' ready to make our rush on Joe's camp. It's up there in the woods about two hundred yards from here. Mind the place, don't you? Well, go an' get it."

"I'll go," said Jake to himself, "an' it'll be the last arrant I go on for one while, I bet you. What's the use of me goin' over on t'other side of the lake, when the men I want to see is on this side? I'll go, but I won't never come back. Pap ain't goin' to find that money, an' he ain't goin' to give me another lickin' like he done to-day, nuther."

If Matt could have seen and interpreted the expression that Jake's face wore as he crawled away in obedience to this order, he might have called him back and gone himself or sent Sam; but he was too busy filling his pipe to notice the boy, and besides it had never occurred to him that he could drive any of his family to rebellion. But he had done it, for Jake never came back to him. He seized the blanket

when he found it, threw it over his shoulder, and struck out for Indian Lake.

"He can go hungry for all I care," muttered Jake, halting now and then and looking back to make sure he was not pursued. "He'll go hungry many a time this winter, if the law don't catch him, for that lazy Sam of our'n wouldn't dare show his head out of camp after dark; so who's goin' to steal grub for him to eat?"

Having determined upon this course, Jake held to it with surprising resolution, and his father and his brother waited long for his coming. At last Matt became angry at his unaccountable absence, but he never once suspected Jake's fidelity.

"Mebbe he's gone an' got himself ketched by them fellers," suggested Sam.

"More likely he's gone an' lost himself or missed the place where I left the blanket," growled the squatter. "I do think we'd best be lookin' into the matter."

"Well, go on, an' I'll stay here till you come back," said Sam, with suppressed eagerness.

"I don't reckon that would be the best plan in the world," answered Matt, who was not to be taken in by any such artifice. "Do you, Sammy?"

"Then you stay an' let me go."

"I don't think that would be the best thing either, 'cause if you went alone them fellers might jump outen their camp an' ketch you. We'll both go, an' then they can't harm us, an' we won't get lost, nuther."

Sam was well enough acquainted with his father to know that the latter had had his suspicions aroused in some mysterious way, and he had suddenly hit upon a plan to outwit him. If he could separate himself from Matt for just five minutes he would put for the outlet at his best pace, induce one of the resident vagabonds to set him across, and then he would secure his treasure and go somewhere—anywhere—so long as he could hold fast to the money and be out of his father's reach. Perhaps, on reflection, he might decide to give it up and claim the reward; but that was a matter that could be settled at some future time. Did the squatter suspect this little

game? Whether he did or not he nipped it in the bud by giving Sam to understand that wherever one went the other would go also, and that there was to be no separation.

"You see, Sammy," said Matt, as he led the way toward the place where he had left the blanket, "if me an' you stick together we won't nuther get lost nor ketched, one or t'other of which has most likely happened to Jakey. 'Tain't like him to stay away less'n he's got some excuse for it."

"Aw! Jake ain't ketched," said Sam, who knew that the only thing he could do was to put a good face on the matter and bide his time. "If he was, wouldn't we have heard him whoopin'? He's lost; that's what's went with Jake."

"Well, if he is, he's lost the grub as well as himself, 'cause there's right where I left the blanket," said Matt, pointing out the exact spot. "He won't stay lost, for Jakey's a master hand to find his way around in the woods. He'll put for the outlet, most likely, an' there's where we will go, too. You toddle on ahead an' I'll foller."

This meant that the squatter was resolved to keep Sam where he could see him, and the latter was careful to do nothing out of the ordinary. When it became too dark for them to continue their journey they lighted a fire and went supperless to bed, with nothing but the leaves for a mattress and the spreading branches of an evergreen for a covering. They slept, too, for Sam thought it wasn't worth while to escape from his father's control while they were so near the outlet. He could not get across before daylight, for the boats were all on the other side, and, more than that, Sam was too much of a coward to deliberately undertake a two-mile tramp through a piece of dark woods. It would be time enough for him to make a move when he was on the same side of the lake that the money was.

Father and son resumed their journey at the first peep of day, and at breakfast time were standing on the bank of the outlet below the hatchery, signaling for a boat. The same accommodating vagabond who had ferried them across two days before responded to their hail, and showed a desire to pry deeper

into their private affairs than Matt was willing he should go.

"Jake's gone off about his business, and if the old woman ain't left camp she's there yet," growled the squatter, in reply to the ferryman's eager questions. "I've got some things to tend to that I forgot about, an' that's why I come back. No; we won't go into your house an' get breakfast, but you can give us a bite to eat as we go along if you're a mind to."

"Did you—you didn't see any body lookin' for you, I reckon?" said the ferryman at a venture. "Well, that's queer. I've heard that there's as many as a dozen or fifteen constables an' guides follerin' of you an Jakey."

"Which side the lake?" inquired Matt, anxiously.

"This side—the one you're jest leavin'."

This was something that was in Matt's favor, but he little thought he had his friend the ferryman to thank for it. The latter had hung around the hatchery all the previous day, and made it his business to put every party of officers and guides who crossed the outlet on Matt's trail, first stipulating for a small share

of the reward in case the information he gave them led to the squatter's arrest. But he had played squarely into Matt's hands. The road that led to his camp was clear, and all he had to do was to keep a close watch upon Sam, who, for some reason or other, showed an almost uncontrollable desire to take to his heels. At last Matt became satisfied that that was just what the boy meant to do; and after they had left the hatchery out of sight, and were walking along the carry Indian file, munching the bread and meat the ferryman had given them, he came to the conclusion that it was time for him to put into operation the plan he had determined upon the day before. Suddenly thrusting what was left of his breakfast into his pocket, Matt took one long step forward and laid hold of Sam's collar. As quick as thought the boy threw both arms behind him and jumped. His object was to leave his coat in his father's grasp, and the only thing that prevented him from doing it was the fact that one of Matt's long, muscular fingers had, by the merest accident, caught under the collar of Sam's shirt. The collar

stood the strain, Matt's finger was too strong to be straightened out, and Sam was a prisoner.

"Aha!" said the squatter, looking into the boy's astonished face with grim good-humor. "You didn't look for your old pap to be so cute, did you? Didn't I give you fair warnin' that a man who had spent the best years of his life in dodgin' guides an' constables wasn't to be beat by his own boys? You've been mighty cunnin', you an' Jakey have, but I'm to the top of the heap now. See it, don't you?"

"What be you goin' to do, pap?" inquired Sam, when he saw his sire put his disengaged hand into his pocket and draw forth the same stout cord that had once been used to confine Jake's hands and feet. "I won't run from you, an' I'll show you where it is, sure."

"Where what is?" demanded the squatter, who wanted to be sure that he had got upon the right track at last.

"Where the valises is—the money."

"There now, you little snipe!" cried Matt, drawing back his heavy hand as if he had half

a mind to let it fall with full force upon the boy's unprotected face. "Oughtn't I to lick ye for makin' me tramp twenty-four miles on a wild goose chase after that money, when you knowed where it was all the while? Dog-gone it! I've a good notion—"

"What's the use of r'arin', pap?" interrupted Sam. "You never offered to go halvers with me, did you? That's all I was waitin' for. You'll get it now, so what's the use of gettin' mad about it?"

"You're right I'll have it now," said Matt, as he proceeded to tie Sam's hands behind his back. "You was kalkerlatin' to show me where the money was soon's I offered to go halvers with you, was you? Then what did you try to jump outen your jacket for when I grabbed you?"

"'Cause I was afeared you'd lick me like you did Jake before I got a chance to talk to you. Don't draw them ropes so tight. What you tyin' me for, anyway?"

"So't you can't run away an' leave me," replied Matt. "I've seed the day when I could ketch you before you'd went ten foot,

but I ain't as young as I was then. You ain't done fair by me. You've fooled me all along, you an' Jakey have, 'an you might take it into your head to show me the wrong place. If you do, I won't have to go fur to find you. Now tell me true: Did Jake hide the money in that there hole where he said he did?"

Sam replied that Jake had told a straight story. He did hide the valises under the roots of the fallen poplar, but he (Sam) had taken them out and concealed them in another place.

"There you be, tied hard an' fast with one end of the rope, an' I'll jest hold the other end in my hand an' be ready to jerk you flat if you try to run," said Matt, when he had finished his task of confining Sam's hands behind his back. "Now put out at your best licks, and go straight to the place where you hid them grip-sacks. What had you made up your decision to do with them six thousand?"

"I was goin' halvers with you an' mam an' Jake," began Sam.

"Aw! Shucks!" exclaimed Matt.

"An' then I was goin' to buy some good

clothes an' things for myself. Now, pap, you're goin' to go halvers with me, ain't you? An' after you get it, you won't lick me like you done Jake, will you?"

"That's a p'int that will take a heap of studyin' before I can say what I'm goin' to do," replied Matt cautiously. "I ain't seen the money yet. Show me that first, an' then I'll talk to you. I don't reckon that you've disremembered where you put it, have you? 'Cause if you have—"

The squatter did not think it necessary to finish the sentence. He stopped, took his ready knife from his pocket and looked around for a switch. This alarmed Sam, who made haste to assure his father that he had the bearings of the hiding-place of the valises firmly fixed in his memory, and that he could go to it without the least difficulty.

"If you do that, you won't get into no trouble with your pap," answered Matt, winking at Sam, and then cutting down a hickory which he proceeded to trim very carefully. "But you an' Jakey do have sich short memories sometimes that I'm afeared to trust you; so I'll

be on the safe side. If I find the money where you say you left it, I won't say a word about the twenty-four mile tramp you made me take for nothing; but I'll l'arn you that the next time you find six thousand dollars you had better bring it to me without no foolin', instead of keepin' it for your own use."

These words frightened Sam, who saw very plainly that he need not hope to escape without a whipping, even if his father found the money. And if he didn't find it, if some one had been there during his absence and stolen the valises from him, as he had stolen them from Jake, then what would happen? Sam thought of his brother's battered countenance and shuddered. Keeping his gaze fixed upon his father's face, he moved his arms up and down, and discovered that they were not as tightly bound as he had supposed. In fact, Sam told himself that if his father would go away and leave him alone for two minutes he would not find him when he returned.

"How do you like the looks of that,

Sammy?" said Matt, shutting up his knife and giving the switch a vicious cut in the air. "It's mighty onhandy an' disagreeable to be a pap sometimes, leastwise when you've got two sich ongrateful boys for sons as you an' Jakey be. This is all your own doin's an' not mine."

"I'll never do it ag'in," whined Sam, who wasn't half as badly frightened now as he was before he found that he could move his hands. "The next time I find six thousand dollars layin' around loose in the woods I'll bring it to you; the very minute I find it, too."

"Then you'll be doin' jest right an' I won't switch you. Now we're all ready an' you can toddle on agin. I hope them valises ain't a very fur ways from here, 'cause I'm in a monstrous hurry to handle the money that's into 'em."

So saying the squatter picked up the free end of the rope and followed Sam as if he were a blind man, and Sam the dog that was leading him. He must have been pretty near blind, or else he did not make the good use

of his eyes he generally did, for he surely ought to have seen that the cord that encircled the boy's wrists was very slack, and that it would have fallen to the ground if Sam had not kept his arms spread out to hold it in place. After two miles had been passed over in this way, Sam stopped in front of the evergreen in which he had placed the valises. The big drops of perspiration that stood on his forehead had not been brought out by the heat, but by the mental strain to which he was subjected. From the bottom of his heart Sam wished he knew what was going to happen during the next two minutes.

"Why don't you go on?" Matt demanded.

"Here we be," answered Sam, faintly. "Look in that tree an' you'll find 'em if somebody ain't took 'em out."

"Whoop!" yelled Matt, knocking his heels together and making the switch whistle around his head. "Took 'em out? Sam, do you know what them few words mean to you? If any body has took 'em out I'm sorry for you. Did you say the valises was in the tree?"

"Yes. I tied 'em fast among the branches

so't the wind wouldn't shake 'em out. Go round on t'other side, stick your head into the tree an' you'll find 'em."

Trembling in every limb with excitement, the squatter dropped the rope, placed his rifle and Sam's carefully against a neighboring tree, and disappeared behind the evergreen. The instant he was out of sight Sam brought his wrists close together, and the rope with which he was confined fell to the ground.

"I'll show pap whether or not I am goin' to stay here an' take sich a lickin' as he give Jakey," thought Sam, as he wheeled about and reached for his rifle. "I wish I dast p'int this we'pon at his head an' make him go halvers with me if he finds it. But shucks! What's the use? He'd steal it from me the first good chance he got, an' then I wouldn't have none an' he would have it all. I'll do wusser'n that for him," muttered Sam, as he moved away from the evergreen with long, noiseless strides. "I'll hunt up old man Swan an' tell him that if he'll go snucks with me on the reward I'll show him where pap is. There, sir! I do think in my soul he's found it."

These words were called forth by a dismal noise, something between a howl and a wail, that arose behind him. Sam had often heard it and he knew the meaning of it. Sure enough his father had found one of the valises. He seized it with eager hands, tore it loose from its fastenings, and dropped it to the ground. It was broken open by the fall, and gold and silver pieces were scattered over the leaves in great profusion. For a moment Matt gazed as if he were fascinated; then he fell upon his knees among them and began throwing them back into the valise, at the same time setting up a yelp that could have been heard a mile away.

"Luck has come my way at last," said he, gleefully. "Sam, I won't lick you, but I must do a pap's dooty by you an' punish you in some way for not bringin' it to me the minute you got hold of it, so I'll keep it all an' you shan't have none of it. Sam, why don't you come around here an' listen to your pap?"

But Matt didn't care much whether Sam showed himself or not, he was so deeply interested in the contents of the valise. After

carefully picking up every coin that had fallen out of it, he gathered the shining pieces up by handfuls and let them run back, all the while gloating over them as a miser gloats over his hoard. When he had somewhat recovered himself he jumped to his feet and dived into the tree after the other valise. He found it after a short search, and placed it on the ground beside its fellow.

"Whew!" panted Matt, pulling off his hat and wiping his dripping forehead with his shirt-sleeve. "It's mine at last, an' I'm as rich as Adam was (I disremember his other name), but I have heard that he had the whole 'arth an' all the money an' watches an' good clothes an' every thing else in it for his own. I ain't got that much, but I've got enough so't I won't have to work so hard nor go ragged no more. Say, Sam, come around an' take a peep at it an' see what you might have had if you'd only been a good an' dutiful son. Sam! Where's that Sam of our'n gone, I wonder."

And Matt's wonder increased when he walked around the tree and found that the boy was nowhere in sight. There lay the cord with

which his arms had been bound, but Sam was missing and so was his rifle. That made the whole thing clear to Matt's comprehension.

"The ongrateful an' ondutiful scamp!" cried the squatter, angrily. "This is another thing that I owe him a lickin' for—runnin' away from his pap. He'll get it good an' strong when he comes home, I bet you, an' so will Jakey. Whoop! I'm boss of this house, an' I don't want none on you to disremember it. Now, what shall I do with my money so't I can keep it safe? I reckon I'd best hunt up the ole woman an' ask her what she thinks about it."

So saying the squatter took his rifle under his arm, seized a valise in each hand, and set out for the cove.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER.

MATT COYLE would have been utterly confounded if he had known, or even suspected, how completely his family had been broken up by the events of the last few days. He labored under the delusion that Jake and Sam had run away simply to escape the punishment they so richly deserved; but they had only made a bad matter worse, Matt told himself, for they would be obliged to return sooner or later, and then they might rest assured the promised whipping would be administered with added severity. But Jake and Sam had gone away with the intention of staying away. They were afraid of their brute of a father, and the cold chills crept all over them whenever they thought of the New London jail. They could not see the justice of being beaten or locked up for something they did not do, and the only recourse they had was to go to those

whom they had been taught to regard as their enemies—the guides and the officers of the law. With the exception of his wife, the squatter's family had all turned against him. Her he found dozing over a fire on the bank of a cove. Without saying a word Matt walked up and showed her the valises.

"What's them, an' where's the boys?" she drowsily asked.

"Now listen at the fule!" shouted Matt. "Ain't you got a pair of eyes? Them's the six thousand dollars that's been a-botherin' of us so long, an' the boys have run off to get outen the lickin' I promised 'em. But they'll come back when they get good an' hungry, an' then I'll have my satisfaction on 'em. You've got a little bacon an' a few taters left, I reckon, ain't you? Well, dish 'em up, an' I'll tell you where I've been an' what a-doin' since I seen you last."

The dinner his wife was able to place before him did not by any means satisfy the cravings of Matt's hunger, and when it had been disposed of there was not a morsel of any thing eatable left in the camp; and, worse than that, Jake

was missing, and there was nobody to steal another supply. Matt talked as he ate, and by the time he was ready for his pipe he had given his wife a pretty full history of his movements during the last two days.

"This ain't a safe country no longer after me tyin' Joe Wayring fast to a tree an' promisin' to lick him if he didn't tell me where the money was," said the squatter in conclusion. "He never had the money, Joe didn't; Sam knew where it was all the while an' never told me. But Joe won't be none the less mad at me, an' I reckon I'd best be lookin' for new quarters for a while. I'm goin' to take the money an' skip out. I do wish in my soul I had a boat. I'd run a'most any risk to get one."

"Where would you go?"

"I'll tell you," replied Matt confidentially. "I've been studyin' it over as I come along, an' have made up my decision that I'd be safer if I was onto their trail 'stead of havin' them on mine; so I'll put as straight for Sherwin's Pond as I can go an' stay there till the thing has kinder blowed over."

"An' what'll I do?" inquired the old woman.

"You? Oh, you ain't done nothin' that the law can tech you for, an' you had better hang around Rube's an' get your grub of him. You can pay him for it by slickin' up his house an' washin' dishes for him, you know."

"What's the reason I can't have some of the six thousand to pay him with?"

"Now listen at you!" vociferated Matt. "Don't you know that if you should offer him money he would know in a minute that you had seen the six thousand an' have you took up for it? I tell you, ole woman," added the squatter, who was resolved to hold fast to every dollar of his ill-gotten gains as long as he could, "my way is the best; an' if you ain't willin' to it, you can jest look out for yourself. Now I'm off. I'll be back directly the thing has kinder died down, like I told you, an' then we'll put out for some place where we can spend our money an' live like folks. Jakey an' Sam'll be back in a day or two, to-night, mebbe, an' they'll look out for you."

The old woman did not say any thing more, for she knew that it would be useless. She lazily smoked her pipe while Matt fastened the valises together and slung them over his shoulder as he would a knapsack, said "so-long" in a drawling, indifferent tone, and saw him disappear in the bushes.

"For the first time in my life I feel like I was a free man," soliloquized the squatter, as he lumbered away through the woods. "I ain't a-goin' to be bothered any more wonderin' where Jakey is to get a new pair of shoes ag'in snow comes, or how I'm to wiggle an' twist to find Sam a new coat, or ask myself whether or not the old woman's got bacon an' taters enough for breakfast. Rube'll take care of her, 'cause he'll suspicion right away that I've got the money an' that I'll be sure to come back to her some day. I'll take care of myself; an' as for the boys—I won't think two times about them ongrateful scamps. They tried their best to cheat me outen my shar' of this money, an' now I'll see how much they'll get."

The squatter continued to talk to himself in

this style during the three hours he consumed in reaching the "old perch hole" at the mouth of the creek, which must be crossed in some way before Matt could fairly begin his journey to Sherwin's Pond. What he was going to do or how he was going to live after he got there, seeing that there were no farmers in the immediate neighborhood upon whom he could forage, Matt had not yet decided; but when he found his progress stopped by the creek he told himself that he might as well rest a bit and smoke a pipe or two while he thought about it. He hunted up a log and seated himself upon it, but almost instantly jumped to his feet and dived into the bushes. It was at that very moment that our party came into the creek. By "our party" I mean Joe Wayring, Arthur Hastings, and Roy Sheldon in the skiff, and Mr. Swan, whose canoe was towing behind. As I have before stated, I occupied my usual place on the skiff's stern locker, where I could see every thing that went on and hear all that was said. On this occasion I saw more than any one else did. I had a fair view of the

valises on Matt's back as they were disappearing in the thicket, but I can't imagine how they escaped the observation of the sharp-eyed guide who sat facing the direction in which the boats were moving. I afterward learned that Matt heard Mr. Swan's voice when he cautioned the boys to speak in a low tone, and be careful how they allowed their oars to rattle in the rowlocks, and I know that when he cast off from the skiff and led the way up the creek the squatter stole silently through the woods and kept pace with him.

"That was a close shave, wasn't it?" chuckled Matt, peeping through the leaves to mark the position of the boats in the creek and then dodging back again. "A little more an' they'd have ketched me, wouldn't they? Now, what did they come in here for, an' where be they goin', do you reckon? I'd most be willin' to say that I'd give a hundred dollars of this money if I had one of them boats of their'n. Then I could go all the way to the pond without walkin' a step. I'll jest toddle along with 'em an' see what they're up to; an' if they leave them boats alone for

a minute they won't find 'em ag'in in a hurry."

The boats moved so slowly and the creek was so crooked that the squatter had no difficulty in keeping up with us. Indeed, he often gained half a mile or more by running across the points while we went around them. I have already told you what Mr. Swan and the boys did when they reached the mouth of the little stream that led from the creek to the cove. They found the camp deserted, as I have recorded, the old woman having set out for Rube's house very shortly after Matt left her alone ; and when they came back to the creek, intending to go into camp there, they found their boats gone.

I thought all along that Matt was following us up the creek, for if I had not caught two distinct views of his evil face peering through the bushes I had certainly seen something that looked very much like it. All doubts on this point were dispelled from my mind before Joe Wayring and his companions had been gone five minutes. While they were moving through the evergreens to surround the camp,

as the guide had directed, Matt Coyle came out and showed himself. The celerity with which that vagabond worked surprised me. He had made up his mind what he would do, and he did it without the loss of a second. He made the painter of Mr. Swan's canoe fast to a ringbolt in the stern of the skiff and shoved it away from the bank. Then he pushed off the skiff, stepped in as soon as it was fairly afloat, and headed it down the stream, using one of the oars as a paddle. Presently the current took us in its grasp and hurried us along at such a rate that we were around the first point before I fairly comprehended the situation. This was the second time, to my knowledge, that the cunning squatter had executed a very neat flank movement upon Mr. Swan and his party. Matt must have thought of it, for I heard him say,

"That's two times I've got the better of you when you reckoned you had me cornered, ain't it? Whoop-pee! Luck's comin' my way ag'in, sure enough. Now I'm all right. I'll take Jake's old canvas canoe, if I can make out to put him together, 'cause he's light to handle

an' won't bother me none if I have to take to the bresh. The other boats I'll hide so't nobody won't never find 'em ag'in. But first I'll hunt me a good quiet place an' have a tuck-out. There's grub an' coffee an' sugar an' sich in the lockers of this skiff, an' I'm hungry for some of it."

The country about was full of little waterways, and Matt, being perfectly familiar with every one of them, had no trouble in finding the "quiet place" he sought. He paddled over to the farther side of the creek, kept along close to the bank for a mile or so, and then pushed the skiff into the bushes. The overhanging branches shut out every ray of light, and it was so dark that I could not see what sort of a place we had got into even when we stopped; but I heard the squatter moving around on the bank, and saw by the aid of a match which he struck on his coat-sleeve that he was lighting a fire. When the dry leaves and sticks he had gathered in the dark blazed up, I could see nothing but a solid mass of hemlock boughs above, and other masses, equally impervious to light, on all sides of me.

It was a better hiding-place than the cove, and the squatter went on building a roaring fire, knowing full well that the blaze could not be seen from the other side of the creek where the discomfited guide and his puzzled young allies were standing, wondering what had become of their boats.

Having gathered wood enough to keep the fire going as long as he had use for it, Matt drew the bow of the skiff high upon the bank and proceeded to overhaul the lockers. With a contemptuous grunt he caught up Fly-rod, who was lying on the locker beside me, and tossed him into the bushes. A second later he sent Arthur's rod and Roy's to keep him company. The cartridges, which were intended for the boys' double-barrel shot-guns, and which he could not use in his old muzzle-loader, Matt incontinently dumped overboard; also the lemons, three gun cases, and as many portfolios filled with writing materials; but the pocket hunting knives and one double-bladed camp ax he laid aside for his own use. At last he came to the articles he was looking for—half a side of bacon, a whole johnny-cake, two

canisters containing tea and coffee, another filled with sugar, and about half a peck of potatoes. He felt in every corner of the lockers in the hope of finding a supply of smoking tobacco; but that was something that never found a place in Joe Wayring's outfit.

Having provided himself with an excellent supper, Matt went ashore to cook it. First he opened the valises and placed them where he could feast his eyes upon their contents, and then he cut off several slices of bacon which he proceeded to broil with the aid of a forked stick. For a platter he used a piece of bark; and every time he put a slice of the meat upon it he would grab a handful of coins from one of the valises and allow them to run slowly through his fingers, laughing the while and shaking his head as if he were thinking about something that afforded him the greatest gratification. He spent an hour over the meal, then replenished the fire and laid down for a nap, covering himself with Roy Sheldon's warm blankets. When he awoke he cooked and ate another hearty supper, shook himself together, and declared that he felt better and in just the

right humor to begin his lonely journey to Sherwin's Pond.

His first task was to put me together; and to my surprise and disgust he accomplished it with very little trouble. Then, in order to make sure that he had not overlooked any thing that he could use, he gave the skiff a second examination, and took possession of all Mr. Swan's provisions. Every other article belonging to the rightful owners of the boats he dropped overboard or flung into the bushes.

"Mebbe they'll find 'em ag'in some day an' mebbe they won't," muttered the squatter, as he extinguished the fire preparatory to shoving off in the canvas canoe. "But if they do it will be long after I am safe outen their reach. They'll never think of lookin' for me so nigh Mount Airy as Sherwin's Pond is, an' there I'll hide as snug as a bug in a rug till my grub's gone, an' then—why, then I'll have to steal more, that's all."

In a few minutes Matt had pushed the canvas canoe through the bushes into the creek, and was plying the double paddle with sturdy strokes. He could travel in the dark as well

as by the light of the sun, and he did not go a furlong out of his course during the whole of the journey. Neither did he have a pleasant time of it. From the hour we started to the time we arrived within sight of Sherwin's Pond the rain fell in torrents. This was a point in Matt's favor, for it was not likely that sportsmen or tourists would venture abroad in such weather unless necessity compelled them; but the unusually high water that came with the rain was to his disadvantage. Indian River ran like a mill-sluice, and the current, strong at all times, became so turbulent and powerful, and its surface was so thickly covered with driftwood and trees that had been floated out of the lowlands, that canoe voyaging was not only difficult but dangerous as well. On one occasion I barely escaped being stove all to pieces. This frightened the squatter so that he gave up traveling by night, and took to the water only when he could see where he was going and what obstacles he had to encounter. More than that, he converted the stolen blankets into bags, put the cargo as well as the valises into them, and lashed them

fast so that they would not spill out in case I were overturned by any of the floating *débris*. But that was a bad thing for Matt to do, as I shall presently show you.

The sight that met my gaze when we came where we could see Sherwin's Pond was one I never shall forget. That little body of water had a way of getting ugly upon the slightest provocation, but I never saw it in so angry a mood as it was on this particular day. It was filled with currents which were running in every direction; at least that was what I thought after I had watched the erratic movements of the logs and stumps that were swimming on its surface. Its numerous inlets had filled the pond more rapidly than its single outlet could relieve it; consequently the pond looked higher than the river, and going into it was like going up hill. Joe Wayring, fearless and skillful canoeist that he was, would have thought twice before attempting to go any farther; but Matt had grown reckless, having journeyed nearly a hundred miles without a ducking, and all he did was to hug the bank a little closer and put more strength into his

strokes with the double paddle. He got along well enough until he came to the place where the mouth of the river widened into the pond, and then came the very disaster I had been looking for. Before Matt could tell what his name was, the current seized me and whirled me out into the middle of the stream as if I had been a feather, sending me there, too, just in time to receive the full force of a terrific blow from the roots of a heavy tree which came rushing along with the torrent. Nothing that was ever made of water-proof canvas could remain afloat after a collision like that. I rolled over and began filling on the instant; and while the eddies were whirling me about, and the gnarled and ragged roots of the tree were enlarging the hole that had been torn in my side, and I was sinking deeper and deeper into the water, I heard Matt Coyle utter one feeble, despairing cry for help, saw him make a frantic grasp at the slippery trunk of the tree as it swept by, and then I settled quietly down to the bottom of the river, taking the blanket-bags and their contents with me. This, thought I, is the end of every thing with

me. I had expected and hoped to go to pieces in the service, but not in the service of such a fellow as Matt Coyle, who had undoubtedly made way with himself as well as me, while trying to do a most foolhardy thing. There was not one chance in a thousand that I would ever be found, or that the Irvington bank would ever learn what had become of its money. When Joe Wayring and his friends went home they might pass directly over me, and I would have no power to attract their attention. I knew Joe would miss me sometimes, but I wasn't so conceited as to think that he could not get another canoe that would more than fill my place. I thought of these things, and then I asked myself what had become of Matt Coyle. If he were a strong swimmer he might succeed in making a landing after the current had carried him a mile or so down the river, provided he could keep out of the way of the driftwood. One thing I was sure of. He would never find me or the money, either. Neither would any body else. If the squatter got ashore I did not see how he was going to live, for the rifle on which he depended principally

to supply his larder during the winter was tied fast to my ribs. If he succeeded in evading the officers of the law, he would have to go to work. I didn't see any other way for him to do.

While I was lying peacefully in my bed at the bottom of the river, wondering how long it would be before the never-ceasing friction of the current would annihilate me utterly, some events that have a slight bearing upon my story were happening in the world above.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EXPERT COLUMBIA.

"STAND perfectly still, boys," said Mr. Swan, when he and his young friends halted on the bank of the creek and discovered that their boats had vanished during their brief absence. "Stand still, or you'll muss the ground up so that I can't see the villain's tracks."

"You don't think they have been stolen, do you?" exclaimed Arthur Hastings.

"I don't think nothing else," answered the guide. "I've handled a boat too long to go away and leave it without pulling it so far out on the bank that the current can't carry it off. I've noticed that you are middling particular about that, too. Of course our boats were stolen. It's one of Matt Coyle's tricks."

"Well, I *am* beat!" cried Joe.

"And under our very noses, too," exclaimed Roy.

"It isn't quite as bad as that, but it's bad enough," said Mr. Swan, who was angry as well as surprised. "This is the second time he has played this game on us, and I don't see why I didn't tell one of you to stay here."

While the guide talked he scraped a few dry leaves and twigs together and touched them off with a match. When they blazed up more fuel was thrown on, and presently Roy pointed out something. It was the print of a big foot in the mud close to the water's edge.

"What better evidence do you want than that?" said Mr. Swan. "Matt Coyle is the only man about Indian Lake who wears such a shabby foot-gear and the only one who lugs a hoof of that size around with him. I know, for I have followed his trail plenty of times."

"Then he must have been the one who kindled that fire."

"It's very likely."

"He may have been intending to camp there for the night when we frightened him away," added Arthur.

"He may have been in camp," assented the guide, "but we never frightened him. He

had wind of our coming long before we got here. Of course I don't know how he got it, but that's the way the thing stands."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"Nothing at all to-night. We'll camp right where we are, and at daylight we'll go back to the hatchery."

"Camp right here," repeated Joe, dolefully. "No blankets, no supper to eat, and no nothing."

"Go back to the hatchery," murmured Roy, "and confess ourselves beaten again by that villain, Matt Coyle. Oh, we're the best kind of fellows to go on a hunt after so cunning a criminal as Matt, ain't we?"

Arthur Hastings was too angry to say any thing except that he was glad the squatter had not run away with his gun as well as his skiff. Mr. Swan was equally glad to have his beloved brier-root and a plentiful supply of smoking tobacco in his pocket. If he had left them in his canoe, as he usually did, he would have had the prospect of a miserable night before him. As it was, he smoked and told stories, and in listening to them the boys forgot that

they had no blankets to cover them, and that they would not find a bite to eat till they reached the hatchery the next day.

When morning came Joe and his friends had nothing to do but brush the leaves from their clothes, smooth their hair with their hands, perform their ablutions in the creek, and then they were ready for their ten-mile walk. Mr. Swan spent a few minutes in looking about Matt's old camp, but did not find any thing to tell him how long it had been deserted or which way the squatter and his family had gone. They arrived at the hatchery tired and hungry, and the bountiful breakfast the superintendent placed before them was a tempting sight. That official laughed when he heard how Matt had stolen up behind them and run off with their boats, and scowled when Roy told him what he and his boys had done in their camp at No-Man's Pond.

"Why, what in the world could have put it into Matt's head that you had the money?" inquired the superintendent; and without waiting for an answer he continued: "It beats the world where that money has gone, but I

think we'll soon get on the track of it. Did you see the watchman as you came by his shanty? Then perhaps you don't know that the old woman was taken into custody last night?"

"No," replied Joe. "We hadn't heard of that. What's the charge?"

"Oh, she was taken in on general principles. I don't suppose she can be held as an accessory, for she hasn't gumption enough to suggest or plan the robberies that her worthy husband has committed; but she knew all about them and can give the officers more help than any body else. You see, ever since Matt and his family left Rube's cabin, the deputy sheriff has taken to sleeping there; and last night who should come poking along but the old woman! When she found that she was a prisoner, she lost heart and answered all the questions the sheriff asked her. She didn't have the pluck to stand out, and I don't wonder at it. She looked as though she was almost starved. She ate more grub than you four are going to eat, judging by the way Joe is backing away from the table already."

"That's good news," said Mr. Swan. "Where's Matt now?"

"On his way to Sherwin's Pond."

"I wonder if that's so, or whether the old woman just made it up."

"I am not sure about that, and neither was the sheriff. I loaned him a boat and a couple of my men, and he's gone up to Indian Lake with the woman. From there he will take her to Irvington. He says she will have to stand her trial with the rest of the family."

"I don't believe that Matt went to Sherwin's Pond," said Joe, after thinking the matter over. "He would be in more danger there than he would if he stayed here. The old woman told that story to throw the sheriff off the track."

"Mebbe not," replied the guide. "Don't we know by experience that the squatter is a master hand to slip around and operate in the rear of his pursuers? What more natural than he should run up to the pond to get behind us, thinking he would be safer there than in the Indian Lake country? At any

rate, there's where I am going as soon as I can get a boat."

"All right," said Joe. "Any thing to keep busy."

"But if I was in your place I wouldn't go there just yet," added the guide. "You want your boat and the other things Matt stole, don't you? Well, then, hire a boat of Hanson, go up the creek, explore every little stream that runs into it on the right hand side as you go up, and you will find some of them. You won't find all, of course, for Matt kept one of the boats, all the provisions, and every thing else that would be of use to him. After you have done that, you can come up to the pond, and you'll be sure to find me and some of the boys there. That would be my plan."

A very good plan it was, too, the boys told one another, and they decided to adopt it. After the superintendent had set them across the outlet, they made the best of their way toward Indian Lake, where Mr. Swan said they would sleep that night. The first persons they saw, when they entered the hotel and

approached the clerk's desk to ask if they could hire a skiff for a few days, were Jake and Sam Coyle. But they were not as ragged and dirty as usual. Their faces had been washed, their hair combed, and somebody had given them whole suits of clothes.

"Where did you catch them?" inquired Roy.

"Right here in front of the house," answered the clerk. "They came in and gave themselves up." And then he went on to tell their story pretty nearly as I have told it. For once in their lives Jake and Sam had told the truth, and the sheriff knew whom he must find in order to recover the money. Of course the boys did not know where their father had gone, but the officer put implicit faith in the old woman's story.

"There's where we've got to go, Swan," said the sheriff, "and there's where we shall find our man, if we find him at all. I have engaged four unemployed guides to go with me, and you will be a big addition to our party. Joe and his friends—"

"They ain't going," said Mr. Swan; and

then he told *his* story, whereat the sheriff laughed uproariously.

"But you are not to blame," said he, consolingly. "Matt would have played the same game on any body else. But he's got to the end of his rope now, for I know just what I have to work on. Don't neglect to lay in a good supply of provisions, for it may take us two or three weeks to catch him, and I am not coming back without him."

Bright and early the next morning two parties left the Sportsman's Home and started away in different directions, the sheriff and his posse heading for Indian River, and Joe and his friends striking for the "old perch-hole." They followed Mr. Swan's advice to the letter, and slept that night in the same camp that the squatter had occupied two nights before. They found the most of their things, too, some in the bushes, some floating in the creek, and the heavy articles, like the two extra camp-axes and superfluous dishes, at the bottom of it.

"Joe's unlucky canoe is gone again, and so are our blankets and all our grub," said Roy.

"The possession of the six thousand dollars must have made Matt good-natured, or he would have smashed our boats before he left."

"Perhaps he didn't think it best to waste time on them," said Arthur. "He might have broken them up in a few minutes with the axes, but we might have heard him. The cove isn't so very far from here."

Having recovered the most of their property the boys became impatient to join the sheriff's posse; but they were not well enough acquainted with the country to make the journey to Indian Lake in the dark. So they built a cheerful fire, cooked a good supper and finally went to sleep wrapped in the new blankets they had purchased to take the place of those Matt Coyle had carried off. Two days later they had returned Mr. Hanson's boat in good order, settled their bills at the hotel, placed Mr. Swan's canoe under cover, and were on the way to the pond in their own skiff. They grumbled at the rain, as the squatter had done when he passed that way a few hours in advance of them, and did most of the rowing with

the awning up and their rubber coats and hats on. After they had made about fifty miles up the river they began telling one another that if the sheriff had gone on to Sherwin's Pond he had made a mistake.

"Just see how the current runs," said Joe, as he tugged at his oar. "Matt, strong as he is, never could have forced the canvas canoe against it. He's camped somewhere, waiting for better weather, and we are getting ahead of him."

The other boys thought so, too, but as they could not tell what else they ought to do they kept on; but they did not attempt to run out of the river into the pond. As Arthur said, "it looked too pokerish." The rain had ceased, but the water was still high, the drift-wood was coming down in great rafts, and the current was so strong that they could not stem it with their three oars. There was nothing for it but to tie up to the bank in some sheltered spot, set the tent, get their stove going to drive the dampness out of it, and make themselves miserable until the water fell. As for hunting up Mr. Swan and his party, that was out of

the question. The boys knew by experience that there was no fun in traveling through a piece of thick woods when every thing was dripping wet. Their quarters, although a little cramped, were dry, warm, and comfortable; they had an abundance of provisions in the lockers, and if it had not been for their impatience to be doing something to aid in the search they might have enjoyed themselves. On the morning of the third day of their forced inactivity, they were surprised to hear a hail close at hand. They looked out and saw a boat with two Mount Airy constables just coming out of the pond into the river.

"Well, well," said one of them, as they came alongside the skiff and laid hold of the gunwale to keep themselves stationary while they talked to the boys. "You have had a time of it, haven't you?"

"Seen any thing of Mr. Swan and the sheriff and the rest of them?" asked Arthur, in reply.

"No. Are they in this part of the country?"

"Here's where they started for. But if

you haven't seen them how do you know that we have had a time of it? You have not been to Indian Lake this summer, have you?"

"No; but we've read the papers."

"The papers?" echoed Joe.

"Yes. The New London *Times* is full of it. It told how Matt Coyle tied Joe to a tree and threatened him if he—"

"I wouldn't have had my mother hear of it for any thing," interrupted Joe. "Of course it worried her."

"Well, rather; but your father's mad and so is your uncle Joe. They've offered a thousand dollars apiece for Matt Coyle's apprehension, and that's what brought us out here in the rain."

"What brought the sheriff up here, any way?" said the other officer. "Where is he now?"

Roy Sheldon, who generally acted as spokesman, replied by relating a long and interesting story, saying in conclusion that he didn't know where the sheriff was, but he and a posse had come to Sherwin's Pond because Matt had

come there, believing it to be the safest place for him. His wife said so.

"Mebbe she did, but that was a blind," replied the officer. "Three boat-loads of us have been out in all the rain, scouring the country high and low, and not the first sign of any body did we see. Swan and his crowd must have gone way up some of the creeks, or else we should have met them."

"Didn't the papers say that my friends rescued me from the squatter's clutches?" inquired Joe.

"Of course they did, but that didn't make your folks feel any easier about you. They'll worry till they see you among them safe and sound."

"Boys," said Joe, decidedly, "I'm going home; but you needn't go. You want to see Matt caught, and I'd like to; but I must go to mother as soon as I can. If you will set me on the other side of the creek I will start without a moment's delay."

"Not much we won't put you on the other side of the creek and leave you to walk twenty-five miles through the wet woods alone,"

answered Arthur. "You ought to go; I can see that plain enough; so we'll all go."

"I think you ought," said the constable. "Your folks will all be uneasy till they see you. They think you and Matt are still in the Indian Lake country, and are afraid he will do some harm to you."

That settled the matter. After a little more conversation the officers went back into the pond to see if they could find any signs of the sheriff and his posse, while the boys cast off the lines that held the skiff to the bank and headed her down the creek. They must make a journey of seventy-five miles in order to get above the rapids that lay between Mirror Lake and Sherwin's Pond. The narrow streams they followed were so difficult of navigation, and the various currents they encountered were so strong, that it took them four days to accomplish it; but the sight of Mirror Lake, with all its familiar surroundings, amply repaid them for their toil.

Of course they went to Joe's home first, for he was the one who had been tied to the tree and for whose safety the Mount Airy people

were mostly concerned. If they had been fresh from a battle-field they could scarcely have met a warmer greeting than that which was extended to them when they walked into Mrs. Wayring's presence and Uncle Joe's. The former, in spite of their protests, insisted on making heroes of them.

"Well," said Uncle Joe, when he had listened to a hurried description of their various adventures, "I don't suppose you were at all disappointed when you found that I could not take you on that trip that we had been talking about for a year or more?"

"Oh, yes, we were," exclaimed Joe. "But we couldn't think of spending more than half the vacation in doing nothing, and that was the reason we went back to Indian Lake."

Leaving Roy and Arthur in conversation with his relatives, Joe Wayring, who had been taught to take care of his things as soon as he was done using them, took his gun under one arm and Fly-rod under the other and went up to his room. A few minutes afterward the boys heard him calling to them from the head of the stairs to "come up" and "come quick."

They went, and found Joe walking about his room in great glee, trundling an elegant nickel-plated bicycle beside him. On the table lay a card to which he directed their attention. Roy picked it up and read:

"I am a present for Joe Wayring, and hope in some degree to recompense him for the disappointment he must have felt when he found that his uncle could not take him on a trip this summer. Use me regularly and judiciously, and if you do not say that life has suddenly doubled its charm—if you do not, before the end of the year, notice a thousand and one improvements in yourself, both physically and mentally, then I shall have failed of my mission. There are two others like me in town, and one of my relations, ridden by Thomas Stevens, the trans-continental cyclist, is now on his way around the world.

"AN EXPERT COLUMBIA."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"NOW isn't he a daisy?" exclaimed Roy, who could scarcely have been more pleased if the wheel had belonged to himself. "Full nickeled, ball bearings, adjustable saddle, safety bar, Buffalo tool bag and lamp. Every thing complete, of course, for your Uncle Joe doesn't do things by halves. Now, Joe, you can ride and Art and I will go afoot."

"Say," cried Arthur, who had taken the card from Roy's hand. "What does this mean? 'There are two others like me in town?' There wasn't a bike in Mount Airy when we left."

"That's so. I wonder who have the others. I wish you had, for I don't want to be the only one of our crowd to get my head broke."

"Thank you for being so disinterested," said Roy. "But if it is all the same to you

I prefer to have my head as it is. But really, I must go home now. Bring him out this afternoon and let us see him throw you."

When the boys went down stairs Joe stepped into the sitting-room to thank Uncle Joe for his beautiful gift. He came out looking more surprised and delighted than ever.

"Now that's an uncle for a fellow to have," said he. "I shouldn't wonder if you fellows would find mates to my machine when you get home. I am going with you to see."

"What makes you think that?" exclaimed Roy and Arthur in a breath.

"Why, I told Uncle Joe that you two had kindly invited me to come out where you could see me thrown, and he said you had better look out or you might be thrown yourselves. Now what did he mean by that?"

The eager boys did not stop to decide, but hurried back to the skiff and pulled for Roy's home at the top of their speed. There another warm reception awaited them, and sure enough a mate to Joe Wayring's wheel was found in Roy's room; and tied to the brake was a card stating that it was a present from his mother.

Of course the other wheel was found at Arthur's home. The three were so nearly alike that if it had not been for the names and numbers engraved upon them it would have been difficult to tell them apart.

You may be sure that canoeing, boat-sailing, and every other sport connected with the water, was at a discount now. During the next two weeks the three friends were rarely seen upon the streets. They were practicing behind the evergreens on Mr. Wayring's lawn, and every time the clanging of one of the gates gave notice of the approach of a visitor they would seize their wheels and run them around the corner of the house out of sight.

"No; we are not ashamed of them," said Joe, in reply to a question his uncle propounded to him one day. "We are ashamed of our awkwardness, and don't mean to give any of the fellows a chance to laugh at us. Wait until we can ride them ten feet without falling off, and then we will go outside the gate."

It did not take the boys very long to attain to that degree of proficiency, for I am told

that riding a wheel is easy enough after you learn to put a little confidence in yourself; but the boys had promised one another that they would not go upon the street until they could "get on pedal-mount," and then they would appear in style, "I bet you."

The satisfaction they experienced, and the good time they enjoyed during their first run about town, amply repaid them for all the trouble they had taken to learn to ride. One bright afternoon, when the pleasant drive-ways of Mount Airy were thronged with stylish coupés and road-wagons drawn by high-stepping horses, Miss Arden and two of her girl friends, all handsomely mounted, suddenly appeared among them. By the side of each rode a uniformed wheelman who managed his steel horse with as much grace and skill as any of the girls managed hers. Such sights are common enough now, but it was a new thing in Mount Airy, and the riders attracted a good deal of attention from admiring friends and excited the ire of the drug-store crowd.

"Didn't we say we would come out in style when we got a good ready?" said Arthur, as

he and his companions dismounted at the post-office after seeing the girls home. "I felt a little nervous at first, but I am all right for the future. Of course I expect to get some falls, but this day's experience has satisfied me that I can stay in the saddle if I only keep my wits about me."

The ice having been broken, so to speak, the boys no longer kept behind the evergreens, but appeared upon the streets every day and enjoyed many a pleasant run. Their wheels proved to be so very accommodating and so easily managed that they wondered they had ever been afraid of them. Of course they began to try tricks. They wouldn't have been live boys if they had not. First, they practiced at making their wheels stand perfectly still; and when they could do that they tried something else. Of course they subscribed for wheelmen's journals, and in one of them read of a rider who could bring his wheel to a stop, get out of his saddle, open his lamp which he had previously lighted, ignite his cigar, close the lamp and mount again without ever touching the ground or tipping his machine over.

They had any number of such examples which they regarded as well worthy of emulation, and Uncle Joe was heard to declare that it was as good as a circus to stand at one of the windows and watch the performances that went on in his brother's back yard.

You may be sure that these three boys did not long remain alone in their glory. Other wheels of different patterns began making their appearance, and one day Tom Bigden and his cousins rode gaily through the village, clad in a uniform of their own invention, and which, it is needless to say, was entirely different from the one adopted by Joe Wayring and his chums. Did this mean that there were to be other rival organizations in town? It looked like it. Every body talked wheel; and the boy who didn't have one was going to get it just as soon as he could make up his mind which was the best. Canoe literature went out of fashion. The *Amateur Athlete* and *L. A. W. Bulletin* were the only papers that were worth reading, and songs of the wheel were the only songs that were worth singing. Even on the school-ground, or when the players

were taking their positions in a game of ball, it was no uncommon thing to hear some fellow strike up:

"Away we go on our wheels, boys,
As free as the morning breeze;
And over our pathway steals, boys,
The music of wind-swept trees.
And 'round by the woods and over the hill,
Where the ground so gently swells,
From a dozen throats in echoing notes
The wheelman's melody wells."

Although Joe Wayring and his friends had so many agreeable things to occupy their minds the events of the summer were not wholly forgotten. When Joe saw a canoeist shooting up the lake, with his arms bared to the shoulder and his dripping paddle flashing in the sunlight, he longed to launch his "old canvas-back" and try conclusions with him. And when Indian summer came, and a schoolfellow showed him a string of muscalonge or pickerel he had caught in some isolated pond to which he had penetrated with the aid of his light draft canoe, Joe wished most heartily that Matt Coyle had not been such an adept at stealing things.

"I'll never see my canoe again," said he, with a sigh of resignation. "I can't say that I hope he will drown Matt, but I *do* hope he will duck him so many times and in such dangerous places that the next time he sees a canvas canoe he will run from it. What's become of him any way?"

That was the question that had been in every body's mouth ever since the day when the two constables returned and reported that Matt Coyle and the six thousand dollars and Joe Wayring's canoe must have sunk into the ground or gone up in a balloon, for no traces of them could be found, although every thicket in the Indian Lake country had been looked into. The squatter's wife and boys were luxuriating in New London jail, awaiting the result of the search. As soon as Mr. Wayring and Uncle Joe read the startling article in the *Times* they offered a large reward for Matt's apprehension, and the former wrote to Joe to start for home without the loss of an hour. But it took a letter a long time to go to Indian Lake by the way of New London, and Joe never received it.

Tom Bigden was in great suspense, and it was a wonder to his cousins how he ever lived through it. He was utterly astounded when he read the papers and saw what his last interview with Matt Coyle had led to. His secret weighed so heavily on his mind that he could not carry it alone, and so he made a clean breast of it to Loren and Ralph, who could not have been more amazed if Tom had knocked them down. Of course they wanted to help him in his extremity, and the advice they gave was enough to drive him frantic. One day they were both clearly of opinion that he had better leave the State for a while and let the trouble blow over. Again, they thought it would be a good plan for him to take his father into his confidence ; and perhaps half an hour afterward they would declare that the only thing he could do was to go to a lawyer about it. Tom listened and trembled, but did nothing. How would he have felt had he known that the boy he had tried to get into trouble was the one who was destined to help him out of his?

" Rumor says that the old woman and both

the boys have told all they know; and I have sometimes thought, by the way folks look at me now and then, that there is more afloat than we have heard of," Tom often said, rubbing his hands nervously together the while. "Don't I wish I knew whether or not they have mentioned my name in connection with this miserable business?"

"I don't see what possessed you to tell Matt that you had seen the valise in Joe Wayring's basket," said Ralph. "If you had had the first glimmering of common sense you would have known better."

"So I would," assented Tom, who was so frightened and dejected that he could not get angry at any thing that was said to him. "But I didn't suppose he would blunder right off after Joe and do something to get himself into the papers. I am glad he didn't tell Joe Wayring that I put the idea into his head, for it would have been just like Joe and his crowd to spread it far and wide. They are jealous of me, and will go to any lengths to injure me."

The short Indian summer passed away all too quickly for the Mount Airy boys, the

autumnal rains put a stop to wheeling, and finally Old Winter spread his mantle over the village and surrounding hills and took the lake and all the streams in his icy grasp. When the boys came out of their snug retreats they brought with them their sleds, skates, and toboggans. Tom Bigden was around as usual, but every one noticed that he did not take as deep an interest in things as he formerly did, or "shoot off his chin" quite so frequently. He permitted Joe's sailboat to rest in peace, and Joe was very glad of that, and often congratulated himself and companions on the fact that they had not once mentioned Tom's name in connection with the events that had happened at the spring-hole.

The holidays drew near, and Roy Sheldon proposed something that had not been thought of for two or three years—a three days' camp in the woods between Christmas and New Year's, and pickerel fishing through the ice. Sherwin's Pond would be a good camping ground, and the mouth of Indian River was the place to go for pickerel. The idea was no sooner suggested than it was adopted ; and on

the 27th of December the three boys set off down the twelve-mile carry, walking in Indian file, and dragging behind them a toboggan which was loaded to its utmost capacity with extra clothing, blankets, provisions, cartridges, and every thing else they were likely to need during their stay in the woods. By two o'clock that afternoon they were snugly housed in a commodious lean-to, whose whole front was open to a roaring fire, and debating some knotty points while they rested from their labors. Who would put on his skates, cut a hole through the ice, and catch a fish for dinner? who would cook the fish after it was caught? and who would cut the night's supply of firewood?

"I wouldn't mind catching the fish, but I don't much like the job of cutting through ice that must be all of ten inches or a foot thick," yawned Roy. "But somebody must do it, I suppose, so I'll make a try at it. Nothing short of a sight of Matt Coyle coming around the point could put much energy into me."

"I was thinking about him," said Joe, as he picked up an ax and whet-stone. "We

thought we were safely out of his reach when we made our camp at No-Man's Pond, and yet he found us easily enough. I wonder if we shall have a visit from him to-day."

"Hardly," replied Arthur. "Tom Bigden isn't around to tell him that we've six thousand dollars stowed away among our luggage."

Having mustered up energy enough to get upon his feet, Roy fastened on his skates, took a "water-scope" under his arm, put an ice-chisel on his shoulder, and disappeared behind the point of which he had spoken, leaving his companions to cut wood for the night. The mouth of Indian River, so turbulent and furious the last time Roy saw it, was now a sheet of glaring ice, over which he moved with long, graceful strokes. He stopped a hundred yards or so below the pond, and went to work with his chisel. It was a twenty minutes' task to cut a hole through the ice and bail out the pieces, and when that had been done Roy pulled the cape of his heavy coat over his head to shut out all the light, and brought the water-scope into play. It was a wooden box two feet long and six inches

square at one end, while the other widened out sufficiently to admit a boy's face. In the smaller end was a piece of window glass, which Roy was careful to wipe with his glove before he put it into the water. These contrivances, made of heavy tin and japanned, are kept on sale now at most gun stores, and you can buy one for a dollar and a quarter; but this one, which Roy made himself, answered every purpose. With its aid he could locate a bright button at the bottom of a stream that was twenty feet deep, provided, of course, that the water was tolerably clear.

Throwing himself flat upon the ice, and drawing the cape of his coat over his head as I have described, Roy thrust the small end of the box into the water and buried his face in the other. There was a deep hole somewhere along that bank in which muscalonge were known to congregate, and Roy wanted to see if he had hit it. He looked at the bottom for about five seconds, and then threw back the cape, jerked the water-scope out of the hole, raised himself upon his knees, and sent up a yell that was so loud and unearthly that it

brought Joe and Arthur around the point in great haste. They probably thought that Roy had been attacked by some wild animal, for they held their guns in their hands and were pushing the cartridges into them.

"Whoop-la!" shouted Roy. "I've struck it rich. Joe, I've found your canoe. Don't believe it, do you? Well, look through that box and tell me what you see."

Joe complied without saying a word, and one look was quite enough to excite him too. Then Arthur took a peep and said:

"Yes, sir; that's the canoe, and there's a rifle lashed fast to one of the thwarts. That's my blanket—the red one with a blue stripe on the end. Now what's to be done?"

"There's something in that blanket, boys," said Joe, after he had taken a second look, "and it is also tied to the canoe. How came those things at the bottom of the river, and where's Matt Coyle?"

"And the money," added Roy.

"We can talk about it while we go back to camp and bring another chisel, and an ax to enlarge the hole so that we can get the canoe

out, and a rope to haul him up with," said Arthur. "The sooner we get to work the sooner we may be able to settle some things. I think that with three of our largest and strongest fish-hooks fastened into him we can pull him up so that we can get hold of him."

The others thought so too, and lost no time in putting the matter to a test. By their united efforts the hole was quickly enlarged to four times its original size, the ice was baled out, and in a few minutes more the campers were angling for a bigger prize than they thought. Not only three, but half a dozen hooks, two in the hands of each boy, were fastened somewhere, either in the sides of the canvas canoe or in the thick blankets that were tied to it, and by careful handling the whole was brought so near the surface of the water that Roy seized it and held it fast. Then with a "pull all together" and a "heave-yo!" the canvas canoe and its valuable cargo, which for four long, dreary months had lain at the bottom of the river, were hauled upon the ice.

"Now, let's see what we've got," said Joe, drawing his knife from his pocket. "Here's

Matt's rifle to begin with." As he spoke he cut the weapon loose and flung it behind him.

"And here's my blanket," said Arthur. "And as I shall never use it again I'll just—"

Arthur made a vicious cut with his knife as he said this, and the result was so astounding that the boys were struck dumb and motionless. A small leather valise slipped out of the rent he made, and falling upon the ice with considerable force flew open, scattering a shower of money before their astonished gaze. Roy Sheldon, being the first to recover himself, danced about like a crazy boy ; Arthur thrust his wet hands into his pockets and whistled softly to himself; and Joe leaned against the canoe and looked. Then he wheeled about, made the hole in the blanket larger, and found the other valise. While he was doing that he discovered and pointed out a gaping wound in my side which neither he nor his friends had noticed before.

"To my mind that explains every thing," said Roy, bringing his wild war-dance to a close and acting more like his sensible self again.

"Matt Coyle braved something that we were afraid to tackle, and got himself snagged and sunk by it. He tried to get into the pond and went to the bottom instead. You can see that he expected a capsize, for he's got every thing tied fast."

"Did Matt go to the bottom with the canoe?" inquired Joe.

"That depends upon whether or not he was a good swimmer," answered Roy.

"I should say it depended more on whether or not the river was as ugly on the day he came along here as it was when we saw it," replied Arthur. "If it was, the chances are that he was drowned; for not one swimmer in ten could get away from that current after it got a good grip on him. Now, let's pick up the money, unload the canoe, and get him to the fire before he freezes stiff."

"This is the second time our fishing has been broken up," said Joe. "Well, the winter isn't half over yet, and it will be easy enough for us to come back at some future time. But we'll never catch another prize like this in Indian River."

This made it plain to me that my master, whose honest, cheerful face I was glad to see once more, intended to start for home as soon as he could get ready. I was glad of it, for if I had been in his place I should not have cared to camp in so wild a region with six thousand dollars of another man's money in my keeping. It made the boys a trifle nervous, and during the night one of them kept watch while the others slept. They broke camp after eating breakfast by firelight, and hardly stopped to rest until the money had been handed over to the officers of the Mount Airy bank, who straightway telegraphed to the Irvington people the gratifying intelligence that their missing funds, which they had given up for lost, had been fished out of the river. Every one said it was a "lucky find," and Tom Bigden wondered if any thing would come of it. If he had been in the bank a day or two afterward, he might have heard something to astonish him. A messenger came from Irvington to claim the money, and Joe and his two friends were invited to meet him. They were able to give him a very accurate description of the adven-

tures through which the valises had passed since they left his bank on the third of August filled with stolen coin, and answered a question or two that was asked them.

"I don't know what kind of a case we shall be able to make out against Sam Coyle and the old woman," said the messenger, "but it's my opinion that Jake will have a hard time of it. Are you going to prosecute any body for stealing your canoe?"

"No, sir," answered Joe. "Matt was to blame for that, and he is dead; got drowned when the canoe was snagged and sunk."

"The boys and the old woman all contend that they wouldn't be half as guilty as they are if one Tom Bigden had not advised and urged them on to commit crime," continued the messenger. "Do you believe it? We mean to sift the matter to the bottom, and want to know how to go about it."

"If I were in your place I'd let all such talk go in one ear and out at the other," replied Joe, earnestly. "Tom Bigden has too much sense to do any thing of the sort."

"But I have heard it from more than one source."

"That may be. So have I; but I don't believe it."

And this was the boy who was "jealous" of Tom Bigden and his cousins, and who was ready to "go any lengths to injure" them, was it? You know how close Tom was to the truth when he made that assertion.

I can not begin to tell you how glad I was to find myself in my old familiar quarters once more, or give you even an idea of the interest and curiosity with which I regarded the handsome stranger, the Expert Columbia, who occupied the recess with me. He wasn't a bit stuck up because he had on more nickel than the rest of us could boast of, and during my time I have found that those who have done great things, or who are capable of them, seldom are stuck up. This new-comer was as common as an old shoe, and as ready to talk to me as I was to talk to him. I wasn't jealous of him for crowding me out of Joe's affections for a while, for I knew that Joe would come back to

me when he wanted to run the rapids into Sherwin's Pond or go a-fishing.

Under my master's skillful care my wound healed rapidly, and in a few days I was ready for service again; but of course I was not called upon. Even when spring opened I was not in demand, but the bicycle was. He began running the very minute the roads would admit of it, and kept it up during the entire season, covering an astonishing number of miles, and saving valuable lives. He met some adventures, too; and what they were and how he came out of them he will tell you in the concluding volume of this series, which will be entitled: "THE STEEL HORSE; or, THE RAMBLES OF A BICYCLE."

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